

LCQ1: Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Population Projections 2022-2046 published by the Census and Statistics Department, the proportion of elderly population in the total population will increase from 20.5 per cent in 2021 to 36 per cent in 2046, meaning more than one in every three Hong Kong people will be an elderly. On the other hand, it is learnt that ageing in the Mainland has become a common phenomenon in recent years. Regarding the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (the GD Scheme), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Social Welfare Department relaxed the eligibility criteria for operators under the GD Scheme in July last year by allowing non-governmental and private organisations alike to register their residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) located in the Mainland cities within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) as Recognised Service Providers, of the respective numbers of applications from such organisations received and approved by the Government since the relaxation of the GD Scheme;

(2) as the Government indicated in May this year that it was exploring the expansion of the GD Scheme to include RCHEs solely operated by Mainland entities this year, and that it was liaising with relevant departments in the GBA cities to conduct on-site inspections and jointly select suitable RCHEs, of the progress of the relevant work; and

(3) of the average monthly expenditure incurred by the Government on each subsidised RCHE place purchased under the GD Scheme?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) Since July 28, 2023, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has relaxed the eligibility criteria for service operators to join the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (GDRCS Scheme). Hong Kong organisations, including non-governmental and private ones, which have experience and a good track record in providing subsidised residential care services for the elderly, may apply for inclusion of their residential care homes for the

elderly (RCHEs) located in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in the GDRCS Scheme. The SWD has received seven applications so far, among which two applications have been approved and have joined the GDRCS Scheme since May 2024, while one application has been rejected. The SWD is vetting the remaining four applications.

(2) The 2023 Policy Address announced that the Government would explore expanding the GDRCS Scheme to include specific RCHEs operated by Mainland organisations in 2024, i.e. RCHEs which do not have experience in operating residential care homes in Hong Kong, so that elderly persons will have more retirement choices in the Mainland cities of the GBA. In November 2023, the Labour and Welfare Bureau signed a letter of intent on collaboration with the Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province. Both sides would kick-start exploring the selection of RCHEs operated by Mainland organisations in designated Mainland cities of the GBA to join the GDRCS Scheme. The RCHEs concerned must be rated four stars or above on the "List of Star-rated Senior Care Organisations" by the Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province based on the standards of the national "Classification and Accreditation for Senior Care Organisation", and have at least a two-year record of operation. With the assistance of the Mainland government departments, the SWD has been visiting RCHEs for selecting more suitable RCHEs to join the GDRCS Scheme, with a view to providing more choices for Hong Kong elderly persons retiring in the Mainland cities of the GBA.

(3) The estimated expenditure for the GDRCS Scheme in 2024-25 is about \$32.5 million. As at end-March 2024, there were about 170 Hong Kong elderly persons joining the GDRCS Scheme. The number of places to be purchased by the SWD each year depends on the number of participating elderly persons. The expenditure on purchasing the places is affected by various factors, e.g. the city and location where the RCHEs are situated, and the facilities and service level of the RCHEs. To avoid affecting the ongoing negotiations on the purchase of places between the SWD and the RCHEs concerned, the Government should not disclose the average monthly expenditure for subsidising the places for the elderly.

Correctional officers stop fighting among remand persons in custody

â€<Correctional officers at Tung Tau Correctional Institution stopped a fight among remand persons in custody yesterday (July 9).

At 11.14pm yesterday, 13 male remand persons in custody aged from 23 to 39 engaged in a fight inside a dormitory. Officers at the scene immediately ordered them to stop, called for reinforcement and applied OC foam to subdue them after repeated warnings were ignored.

During the incident, a remand person in custody sustained injuries to his nose and leg. He did not need to be sent to hospital after receiving medical examination and treatment by the institution Medical Officer. The remaining remand persons in custody did not sustain any injury.

The case has been reported to the Police for investigation.

The 13 persons in custody were remanded for offences that include trafficking in dangerous drugs, robbery, manufacture of dangerous drugs and wounding with intent.

LCQ22: Funding schemes promoting logistics development

Following is a question by the Hon Jimmy Ng and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

In recent years, the Government has launched a number of funding schemes to promote modern logistics development and assist the industry in better grasping the latest trends in smart logistics and e-commerce business, including setting up the Logistics Promotion Funding Scheme (LPFS) and the Professional Training on Smart and Green Logistics Scheme (PTSGLS), as well as enhancing the Pilot Subsidy Scheme for Third-party Logistics Service Providers (the Pilot Scheme). Some members of the logistics industry have expressed concern about the vetting and approval of the aforesaid schemes, while hoping that the Government can further enhance these schemes. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications received, approved, rejected and being processed by the authorities since the introduction of enhancement measures to the Pilot Scheme in February this year; among the approved applications, the average funding amount per case and the number of applications which have benefited from the extended scope of funding as a result of the enhancement measures; the latest progress of the authorities' work in regularizing the Pilot Scheme;

(2) of the respective numbers of applications received, approved, rejected and being processed by the authorities since the launch of LPFS; among the approved applications, the average funding amount per case; whether the authorities will extend the scope of funding under LPFS to cover projects organized outside Hong Kong which are related to the promotion of modern and smart logistics, so that successful applicant organizations can promote the strengths of Hong Kong as an international premier logistics hub to more

overseas enterprises; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the respective numbers of applications received, approved, rejected and being processed by the authorities since the launch of PTSGLS; the number of training courses approved for funding, as well as the theme, number of places and enrolment for each of these courses; the average funding amounts provided by the authorities for each training course and each participant who attended the training course for the first time?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the development of Hong Kong's logistics industry and has all along been supporting and enhancing Hong Kong's position as a regional logistics hub through different measures, including the promulgation of the Action Plan on Modern Logistics Development on October 31, 2023, that formulated eight strategies and 24 action measures in five development directions, namely smart development, modernisation, green and sustainability, internationalisation and facilitation, to address the short, medium and long-term needs of the logistics industry, thereby achieving the goal of developing Hong Kong into a sustainable international smart logistics hub focusing on high-value goods and the e-commerce market.

In particular, in terms of the support for the logistics industry to develop towards the directions of smart logistics and green logistics, the Government has launched the Professional Training on Smart and Green Logistics Scheme and the Logistics Promotion Funding Scheme respectively under the Maritime and Aviation Training Fund this year, and enhanced the Pilot Subsidy Scheme for Third-party Logistics Service Providers, so as to strengthen the support towards the logistics industry to undergo digital transformation, adopt smart logistics solutions, as well as achieve environmental, social and governance (ESG) targets so as to promote green logistics.

The reply in response to Hon Jimmy Ng's question is as follows:

(1) Since implementation of the Pilot Scheme in October 2020, a total of 351 applications were received, of which 249 were approved, involving a subsidy amount of around \$150 million. Since February this year, enhancement measures to the Pilot Scheme were rolled out, which included increasing the cumulative funding ceiling for each applicant enterprise from \$1 million to \$2 million, as well as extending the scope of funding to cover ESG technology solutions and related implementation services (including consultancy services) and project-based trainings associated with technology implementation. Since the implementation of the enhancement measures, as of June this year, a total of 29 applications were received, of which two were approved, 23 are being vetted and four were withdrawn before vetting. The amount of subsidy for each of the two approved applications is below \$1 million. The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme and duly explore the possibility of the regularisation of the Pilot Scheme.

(2) The Logistics Promotion Funding Scheme aims to subsidise eligible logistics-related organisations and professional bodies to organise local promotional campaigns and activities, so as to rebrand the modern logistics industry as "smart, innovative and high-end", with a view to attracting more young people to join the industry as well as promoting the strengths of Hong Kong as an international premier logistics hub to both local and overseas companies. Since its launch in January this year, as of June this year, a total of four applications were received under the Logistics Promotion Funding Scheme, of which two were approved and the other two are being vetted. The amount of subsidy of the two approved applications is \$700,000 and \$100,000 respectively. The Government will review the effectiveness and coverage of subsidy of the Logistics Promotion Funding Scheme from time to time.

(3) The Professional Training on Smart and Green Logistics Scheme subsidises eligible logistics associations and training/education institutions to organise local training courses related to modern, smart and green logistics with a view to supporting in-service practitioners to equip themselves with up-to-date knowledge of smart and green logistics. Since its launch in January this year, as of June this year, a total of five applications were received under the Professional Training on Smart and Green Logistics Scheme, of which two were approved. The two approved applications are related to sustainable logistics development and green logistics, providing a total of 60 places. As the relevant training courses are still at the admission stage, the number of enrolment and average amount of subsidy are not available yet. The remaining three courses are being vetted.

LCQ3: Enhancing labour importation schemes

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

Under the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS), wages of imported workers should be at least the median monthly wages (median wages) of comparable positions in the market, and employers are required to pay the Employees Retraining Levy (ERL) of \$9,600 in a lump-sum in respect of a two-year contract for each worker. The ERL paid is not refundable even if the contract is terminated prematurely. Many members of the industry have pointed out that with the median wages, ERL and accommodation costs, labour importation has become too costly, thus failing to help enterprises reduce operating costs and enhance competitiveness, and it is learnt that Singapore

has not set the minimum wage for foreign workers in some industries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will review the requirement that wages of imported workers should be at least the median wages; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that in the reply to my question on April 10 this year, the Government indicated that it did not have plans to include the retail and catering sectors in the sector-specific labour importation schemes for the time being, of the reasons for that; whether it will, in the light of the latest market situation, consider afresh including such sectors in the Schemes; and

(3) whether it will consider conducting an interim review of the ESLS one year after its implementation, including regularising the arrangement of accepting labour importation applications for the 26 job categories normally excluded from the Supplementary Labour Scheme, as well as revising the ERL as payable monthly and refunding employers for the overcharged ERL; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To cope with the challenges brought about by manpower shortage, the Government has enhanced the mechanism for importation of workers. Apart from launching sector-specific labour importation schemes for the construction sector, transport sector, and residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities, the Labour Department (LD) has also implemented the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme (ESLS) since September 4, 2023, to enhance the coverage and operation of the Supplementary Labour Scheme (SLS) in the past, including suspending the general exclusion of the 26 job categories (set out at Annex) as well as unskilled or low-skilled posts from labour importation for two years, with a view to alleviating the manpower shortage of other sectors (including the retail industry and the food and beverage services industry). Nevertheless, any mechanism for labour importation must be operated on the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers.

The reply to the Hon Shiu Ka-fai's question is as follows:

(1) For the purpose of upholding the employment priority for local workers, the applicant employer of the ESLS must undertake a four-week local open recruitment and give priority to employing suitable local workers to fill the vacancies at a salary not lower than the prevailing median monthly wage of a comparable position in the market. In parallel, employers approved to import workers under the ESLS are required to sign a Standard Employment Contract prescribed by the Government with the imported workers, and shall pay a salary not lower than the median monthly wage of a comparable position. These requirements are important measures to prevent the imported workers from becoming cheap labour and undermining the employment opportunities of local

workers. As such, the Government has no plan to change the requirements at this stage.

(2) As compared with the SLS in the past, the ESLS provides employers (including establishments in the retail industry, and the food and beverage services industry) with more flexibility in applying for importation of workers. The ESLS sets no quota on imported workers and accepts applications year-round.

In addition, the LD has been continuously improving the workflow of case processing under the ESLS, including introducing an application form for common posts; deploying staff designated to vet applications submitted by employers to expedite the preliminary screening process; exercising flexibility in the handling of recruitment advertisements placed by employers during local recruitment and expediting the follow-up on interview results, and organising briefings for employment agencies involved in labour importation matters. With the implementation of the aforesaid measures, case processing has become more effective and efficient. From April to June 2024, the numbers of imported workers approved to take up posts in the retail industry, and the food and beverage services industry were 1 035 and 5 917 respectively, which were higher than the numbers of imported workers applied for in the same period (810 and 5 403 respectively). At present, if an employer uses the application form for common posts and provides all required information and documents at the same time, the application will normally be screened-in within a short period of time, after which the employer can proceed with the four-week local recruitment immediately. The Government sees no imminent need to launch sector-specific labour importation schemes for the retail industry and the food and beverage services industry at this stage.

(3) Since the launch of the ESLS, the Government has been closely monitoring the implementation of the scheme. The LD will review the coverage and operation of the ESLS prior to the lapse of its two-year implementation period.

The Employees Retraining Ordinance (Cap. 423) (the Ordinance) sets out the current arrangement for the payment of the Employees Retraining Levy. Section 14(2) of the Ordinance stipulates that the amount of the levy payable in respect of each imported employee employed by an employer shall be the sum specified in Schedule 3 (i.e. \$400) multiplied by the number of months specified in the employment contract between the employer and the imported employee. Section 15(2) of the Ordinance specifies clearly that under no circumstances will the levy paid be repaid or refunded to the employer.

The levy is transferred to the Employees Retraining Fund administered by the Employees Retraining Board for providing training and retraining to local workers. The Government has no plan to alter the levy arrangement which is in line with the policy objective of encouraging the training of local workers.

LCQ15: Traffic light control system

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Siu-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

The Transport Department (TD) has installed a new type of pedestrian traffic light countdown device at the signalised junction of Tat Tung Road/Mei Tung Street in Tung Chung, with the countdown starting to display when the "green man" light is on, so as to assist pedestrians to gauge the total time remained for the "green man" light for crossing the junction, thereby enhancing pedestrian safety. The device has started operating and testing since December 2023, and the TD has engaged a local university to conduct survey and study on the impact of the device on pedestrian crossing behaviour. It is expected that the entire test scheme will be completed in the middle of this year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether the aforesaid test scheme has been completed; if so, of the timetable for announcing the test results (including the effectiveness of the aforesaid device);
- (2) of the respective relevant expenditures involved in the aforesaid test scheme (including but not limited to the fees for the design of the system, procurement of components, and engagement of the university to conduct survey and study);
- (3) of the differences between the new type of pedestrian traffic light countdown device under the aforesaid test scheme and the pedestrian traffic light countdown device tested by the TD in 2006 and 2018; given that the two studies conducted in 2006 and 2018 concluded that the device concerned brought no material improvement and benefit to pedestrian safety and was therefore not further applied extensively, of the reasons for the TD to relaunch the test scheme of the countdown device last year;
- (4) how it assesses the effectiveness of the new type of pedestrian traffic light countdown device under the aforesaid test scheme, and of the criteria to be adopted for determining the installation of the device at other locations; and
- (5) whether it will consider, by drawing reference from the experience of other places in the world, conducting a trial on the "vehicular traffic light countdown device" for motorists, or studying the feasibility of applying such device in Hong Kong; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Transport Department (TD) in respect of traffic light countdown device, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Siu-hung is as follows:

(1) and (4) TD has installed a new type of pedestrian traffic light countdown device (the new pedestrian countdown device) at the pedestrian crossing of Tat Tung Road/Mei Tung Street in Tung Chung in 2023 for testing. Unlike the pedestrian countdown device tested in 2006 and 2018 (which started counting down when the "green man" light began to flash), the new pedestrian countdown device starts counting down when the "green man" light is on, such that pedestrians can gauge the total green time remained. The aforementioned new pedestrian countdown device has started operating since mid-December 2023. To objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the countdown device at the above crossing, the TD engaged a local university to conduct study and surveys on its impact on pedestrian crossing behavior. The research team collected data on pedestrian crossing behavior using sensors and conducted on-site questionnaires at the end of 2023 (before the device started operating) and early 2024 (after the device started operating). Preliminary data shows that after the installation of the countdown device, there is an improvement in pedestrians completing crossing the road before the flashing "green man" light ends, showing that it is more effective than the tests conducted in 2006 and 2018. The research team is currently conducting detailed analysis and compiling report based on the collected data from the surveys, so as to summarise the results of the trial in Tung Chung and explore how to further validate the effectiveness of the new pedestrian countdown device.

If the detailed study confirms the positive effects of the new pedestrian countdown device, such as its effectiveness to reduce the proportion of pedestrians who cannot completely cross the road before the flashing "green man" light ends and improve pedestrian safety, the TD will consider selecting further pedestrian crossings with different site conditions (such as pedestrian flow, road width as well as crossing time required, and characteristics of the local population, etc) to test the new pedestrian countdown device for a more comprehensive understanding of its application and performance at other locations in Hong Kong with different characteristics, which will facilitate the setting of direction of the next phase.

(2) The expenditure of the trial on new pedestrian countdown device was about \$1.14 million. The breakdown of expenditure is as follows:

Items	Expenditure (\$'000)
1. Software and hardware for the countdown device (including the development/design, procurement, installation and testing of equipment, temporary traffic arrangements, etc)	573

2. Study on the effects on pedestrian crossing behavior (including installation of sensors for collecting pedestrian crossing data, conducting analysis and statistics, detailed study, etc)	571
Total	1,144

(3) To enhance traffic safety, the TD continually monitors technological advancements, arrange trials and introduces new traffic signal technologies for providing better protection for road users. In 2006 and 2018, the TD selected some signalised pedestrian crossings for trials by installing pedestrian countdown devices at the traffic lights which started counting down when the "green man" light began to flash, and studied if the pedestrians could adjust their walking speed appropriately and complete crossing the roads before the lapse of flashing "green man" light. Based on the surveys respectively conducted by two local universities, it was in general revealed that after the installation of the device, overall more pedestrians were unable to complete crossing the roads before the lapse of the flashing "green man" light. In 2023, the TD was aware of the development and application of the new countdown device technology, and hence arranged the tests in Tung Chung to obtain preliminary understandings on its impact on the crossing behavior of pedestrians.

(5) As for the effectiveness of vehicular traffic light countdown device, there is no worldwide general consensus on its merits. The TD considers that motorists' responses to the remaining green time displayed on the device could be very diverse. For instance, some drivers might decide to slow down and stop when they notice the green time is coming to an end whilst some other drivers might choose to rush through the junction, resulting in a higher risk of head-rear collision between vehicles. With the view to uphold road safety, vehicular traffic light countdown devices were not implemented in Hong Kong. The TD will continue to closely monitor the development and application of these devices in other regions.