

LCQ18: Increasing resources for ambulance service

Following is a question by the Hon Edmund Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

During the period when the fifth wave of the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic was extremely severe, the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD) experienced a surge in the demand for ambulance service. However, as a result of absence from work of ambulancemen/ambulancewomen who had been infected with the disease and the shortage of ambulances, the performance of ambulance service fell far short of the performance pledge made. There are views pointing out that the Government needs to increase the manpower and equipment for ambulance service as well as increase the number of ambulances, so as to make preparations for the sixth wave of the epidemic or incidents of major public health crisis in case they emerge. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current total number of ambulances in Hong Kong, with a breakdown by vehicle age; the number of ambulances, in each of the past six months, which could not attend to service calls due to damage, malfunctioning, regular examinations and maintenance, as well as the number of ambulances which could attend to service calls on average each day; whether it has plans to allocate additional resources to the FSD for procuring additional ambulances and replacing ambulances which are relatively old; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) of the staffing establishment of the Outbreak Control and Response Team (OCRT) set up by the FSD during the epidemic and the expenditure involved; whether the FSD will consider including the OCRT in the permanent establishment; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Fire Services Department (FSD), the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at May 6, 2022, the FSD has a total of 437 ambulances with the age profile as follows:

Age of ambulances	Number of ambulances
Less than 1 year	44

1 to 2 years	62
2 to 3 years	54
3 to 4 years	72
4 to 5 years	62
5 to 6 years	58
Above 6 years	85
Total	437

During the half-year period from November 1, 2021 to April 30, 2022, the monthly average number of ambulances which are unavailable for deployment due to maintenance and repair, and the monthly average number of ambulances which are available for deployment are tabulated below:

(Monthly average number)	November 2021	December 2021	January 2022	February 2022	March 2022	April 2022
Ambulances unavailable for deployment because of maintenance and repair	79	76	72	63	47	55
Ambulances available for deployment	358	361	365	374	390	382

Since 2010, the FSD has put in place a steadier and more predictable ambulance replacement programme with a view to more effectively monitoring the age profile and serviceable conditions of ambulances, facilitating the planning and managing of the replacement of ambulances over a reasonable timeframe. In general, the normal serviceable life of an ambulance is about seven years. Under this replacement programme, the FSD will arrange the replacement of ambulances which are aged above seven years, so as to maintain the age of ambulances at a healthy level and the reliability of the fleet. The FSD will also seek resources through the existing resource allocation mechanism to procure additional ambulances when necessary according to the demand for emergency ambulance service.

(2) The FSD has set up the Outbreak Control and Response Team (OCRT) in October 2021. Its major work includes monitoring the latest development of infectious diseases (including COVID-19) in the globe and Hong Kong, so as to formulate the department's contingency plan and assist in co-ordinating inter-departmental operations; co-ordinating with relevant stakeholders at specific high-risk infected areas, medical facilities and community isolation facilities for conducting risk assessments and formulating guidelines in advance for the operations of frontline ambulance personnel, with a view to

ensuring that the operations can be completed efficiently with minimum infection risks; formulating departmental instructions and operational guidelines relating to infectious diseases in consultation with the department's medical director, providing training to members of the department on the prevention of infectious diseases, reviewing and improving the work flow in the handling of infectious disease cases, thereby reducing the risk of staff being infected; providing training and conducting random spot checks on the disinfection of ambulances to reduce the risk of the spread of virus in the community; and specialising in the handling of cases related to High Consequence Infectious Diseases (such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome or Ebola Virus Disease, etc.). The OCRT comprises members with relevant professional knowledge on infectious disease control, clinical skills for handling patients with infectious diseases and the capability to use special personal protection equipment and anti-epidemic tools.

The permanent establishment of the OCRT includes one Senior Ambulance Officer, one Ambulance Officer, two Senior Ambulancemen and four Ambulancemen, involving a yearly expenditure of about \$4 million. If necessary, the FSD will deploy its manpower flexibly by drawing qualified ambulance personnel from other teams to join the OCRT to cope with the workload.

Import of poultry meat and products from areas in US suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (May 18) that in view of a notification from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Lyon County of the State of Minnesota, Sequoyah County of the State of Oklahoma and Berks County of the State of Pennsylvania in the United States (US), the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above-mentioned areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that according to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 3 640 tonnes of chilled and frozen poultry meat and about 135.82 million poultry eggs from the US in the first three months of this year.

"The CFS has contacted the American authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the OIE and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response

to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

LCQ8: Putonghua proficiency of civil servants

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

The Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening Language and Writing Work in the New Era (the Opinions), which was issued at the end of last year by the General Office of the State Council, puts forward a goal of achieving a national Putonghua penetration rate of 85 per cent by 2025. On the other hand, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has indicated that its target is to develop and maintain a civil service that is proficient in both written Chinese and English as well as conversant in Cantonese, Putonghua and spoken English. Regarding the Putonghua proficiency of civil servants, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of Putonghua training programmes provided by the Government for civil servants and the number of participants, in each of the past five years; what measures are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of such training programmes;

(2) whether it has assessed the current Putonghua proficiency of civil servants; if so, of the details and their proficiency as assessed; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) in view of the aforesaid goal put forward in the Opinions, whether the Government will include civil servants' participation in Putonghua training and their Putonghua proficiency as assessed in the considerations for promotion of civil servants; if so, of the details; if not, how it ensures that civil servants are proficient in Putonghua in order to achieve that goal?

Reply:

President,

Chinese and English are both the official languages of Hong Kong. It is the Government's policy to maintain a fully biliterate (Chinese and English) and trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua and English) civil service to ensure effective communication with the public in discharging their official duties.

Heads of Department/Grade would, having regard to the job requirements of the grades under their purview, specify appropriate Chinese and English language proficiency requirements (including Putonghua) as part of the entry requirements of the grades concerned.

In fact, since 1998, Putonghua has become one of the compulsory subjects at the primary and junior secondary levels. It is stipulated that the subject should be taught by teachers who meet the Putonghua language proficiency requirements. From our overall observations, recruits to the civil service in recent years have in general attained a certain level of Putonghua proficiency. In assessing whether the candidates can meet the Putonghua proficiency required by the grade concerned, the recruiting department/grade may, having regard to its operational needs, decide on the appropriate assessment method(s), such as requiring candidates to answer questions in Putonghua during selection interviews, or requiring candidates to attain specific results in designated Putonghua proficiency tests.

Notwithstanding the above, the Civil Service College (the College) under the Civil Service Bureau is making on-going efforts to promote Putonghua training for civil servants to enhance their ability in using Putonghua. Taking into account the different needs of civil servants, the College provides training at different levels, including courses at basic, enhanced and professional levels, as well as those on enhancing customer service and communication. The College also organises thematic seminars on Putonghua, covering comparisons between Cantonese and Putonghua, presentation skills, ways to enhance Putonghua proficiency and workplace applications. Elements related to social developments in the Mainland have also been incorporated into the training, such as new things and topics involved in daily lives in Mainland cities, as well as differences between Cantonese and Putonghua in common expressions. In addition, the College provides civil servants with a wealth of e-learning resources, which cover correct pronunciation, similarities and differences between Cantonese and Putonghua, frequently-used terms, and common phrases, conversations and exchanges for official occasions etc.

In the past five years (from 2017 to 2021), the Civil Service Bureau organised nearly 500 Putonghua training courses and seminars for about 13 000 participants. We would collect participants' feedback on the programmes by means of evaluation questionnaires, and would keep in view the learning effectiveness of the programmes through class observations and exchanges with participants, commissioned institutions and trainers. The feedback of participants on the Putonghua programmes has been very positive. They generally considered the training useful to their work, and 95 per cent of the participants have rated the programmes as "outstanding" or "very effective". In addition to the training offered by the College, individual departments/grades also provide in-house Putonghua training to meet their operational needs.

Under the existing performance appraisal system, the ability of civil servants (particularly those of degree/professional grades) in using Putonghua at work is one of the competencies subject to assessment. The

language-related qualifications acquired and training programmes attended during the appraisal period would be recorded in the appraisal. The appraising officer would also make recommendations on the appraisee's training needs (including those on language training).

The promotion of civil servants is based on the criteria stipulated in the Civil Service Regulations, including the officer's character, ability (both performance and potential), experience and qualifications prescribed for the promotion rank, and is subject to the selection and recommendation of the promotion board. The most meritorious and suitable officers would be selected for filling the posts in the promotion rank. Civil servants' language proficiency (including that of Putonghua) is reflected in their job performance, which in turn is one of the important factors to be considered for promotion.

The Civil Service Bureau will continue to strengthen Putonghua training for civil servants, and encourage them to actively participate in training programmes and make good use of e-learning resources for continuous learning, with a view to enhancing the overall ability of the civil service in using Putonghua.

LCQ14: Promoting liquidity of stock market

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Tan Yueheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

Some financial institutions have estimated that China Concept Stock (CCS) companies that meet the requirements of secondary listing and return to Hong Kong may, by the end of 2024, bring about approximately HK\$200 billion of new financing needs. Some investors are concerned whether such situation will create pressure on the liquidity of the stock market in Hong Kong. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed the financing scope involved in the listing of the aforesaid CCS companies on their return to Hong Kong, as well as the impacts of which on the liquidity of the stock market;

(2) of the specific plans and timetable for expanding the liquidity pool, including attracting more Mainland and international capital to flow into Hong Kong to promote liquidity of the market, thereby preparing well for the return of CCS companies of a certain scale; and

(3) whether it has plans to review and update with Mainland regulatory bodies the contents of the Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect and Shenzhen-Hong Kong Stock Connect, so as to further expand the investment coverage under these mechanisms, thereby increasing the liquidity of the stock market in Hong Kong; if so, of the specific propositions; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

As an international financial centre, Hong Kong possesses a deep and broad stock market and is also a major global listing platform for companies from different jurisdictions. In 2021, Hong Kong raised over \$300 billion for almost 100 enterprises through initial public offerings (IPOs). The Government, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX), the Securities and Futures Commission (SFC) and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) will continue to strengthen the breadth and depth of the Hong Kong fundraising platform, as well as to ensure the resilience of Hong Kong's financial system and safeguard investors' interests.

In consultation with the HKEX, the SFC and the HKMA, my reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) Regarding China Concept Stocks, the Financial Stability and Development Committee under the State Council stated after the meeting on March 16 that the regulatory bodies concerned maintained good communication on the regulation over US-listed Chinese enterprises and made positive progress. The two sides were working on a concrete co-operation plan. Subsequently, the China Securities Regulatory Commission also indicated that it would further expand high quality market opening-up and strive for an early implementation of new draft rules for overseas listings, rendering continued support for eligible companies to seek listings in overseas markets, continuing to deepen cross-boundary regulatory co-operation, and promoting healthy and orderly overseas listing activities.

Hong Kong has a highly open and internationalised market, which is not only conducive to addressing the needs of Mainland and international investors, but also provides a highly efficient, open and transparent global listing platform where enterprises from different sectors raise significant amount of funds every year. Since 2020, China Concept Stocks issuers have made relevant arrangements according to their respective circumstances. As of April 2022, 21 China Concept Stocks issuers have returned to Hong Kong through secondary listing or dual primary listing, the total market capitalisation of which accounted for over 70 per cent of all China Concept Stocks listed in the United States. The HKEX and regulators have been closely monitoring the developments and market situation, and striving to facilitate quality China Concept Stocks to return through a series of enhancements to the listing regime while balancing the risks involved and investor protection, so as to further enrich the attractiveness of Hong Kong's securities market.

On market liquidity, the Basic Law prescribes that no foreign exchange control shall be applied in Hong Kong, and the Government shall safeguard the free flow of capital within, into and out of Hong Kong. The trading, clearing and settlement activities of the HKEX have been conducted orderly all along. The average daily turnover in 2022 (as at April) was \$139.6 billion, representing an increase of over 60 per cent compared with that following the implementation of the new listing regime in April 2018 (i.e. the average daily turnover in 2019). Thanks to our robust and effective regulatory regime and a well-established institutional framework for systemic risk monitoring, Hong Kong's financial markets have been functioning in an orderly manner with ample liquidity.

Separately, China Concept Stocks with dual primary listing status could be included as eligible securities under Stock Connect currently if they fulfill the relevant requirements. The regulatory authorities of the Mainland and Hong Kong expanded the daily quota under Stock Connect with effect from May 1, 2018, under which the Northbound daily quota for each of the Shanghai-Hong Kong Stock Connect and Shenzhen-Hong Kong Stock Connect was increased from Renminbi (RMB) 13 billion to RMB 52 billion respectively, while the Southbound daily quota for each of them was increased from RMB 10.5 billion to RMB 42 billion respectively. According to the data over the past six months (i.e. from November 2021 to April 2022), the quota usage has not reached the limit, indicating that the existing quota is able to satisfy market demand.

The Government and regulators have also been monitoring the excessive liquidity lock-up as well as the potential liquidity stress on the banking system amid large-scale shares offerings and when multiple IPOs are carried out in parallel. The HKMA operates the Hong Kong Dollar Liquidity Facilities, including Settlement Facilities and Standby Liquidity Facilities, which make liquidity support available to banks to manage unexpected liquidity tightness. The HKMA has the capability and experience to ensure the efficient operation and ample liquidity of the Hong Kong money market.

Meanwhile, the HKEX has announced that it will proceed to launch FINI (Fast Interface for New Issuance), an electronic IPO settlement platform. The platform will reduce the settlement cycle from T+5 to T+2. The clearing participants responsible for handling subscription of new shares will also be allowed to opt in for a compressed prefunding requirement, whereby they are only required to deposit the highest possible total share allotment value. The arrangements could further relieve the liquidity stress brought about by shares offerings.

(3) The deepening of integration and interaction of financial markets between the Mainland and Hong Kong has been the policy objective of the Government. In order to further expand the mutual access of financial markets of the two places, we have included pre-revenue/pre-profit biotechnology companies listed in Hong Kong and companies listed on the Mainland's STAR Market (Shanghai Stock Exchange's Sci-Tech Innovation Board) that fulfill certain criteria in the scope of eligible securities under Stock Connect from

December 2020 and February 2021 respectively.

In addition, the HKEX, Shanghai Stock Exchange, Shenzhen Stock Exchange and China Securities Depository and Clearing Corporation Limited reached an agreement on the Stock Connect inclusion arrangements for exchange traded funds (ETFs) in December 2021. The parties are working closely on the business and technical preparations with a view to facilitating trades as soon as possible. A working group, formed by the SFC, the HKEX and the HKMA, has also completed the feasibility study on allowing stocks traded via the Southbound Trading of Stock Connect to be denominated in RMB and put forth recommendations. The working group is proceeding with the necessary preparation in this regard and discussing with the regulatory authorities and relevant organisations in the Mainland. The Government will roll out supporting measures to increase the liquidity of RMB-denominated stocks alongside the launch of the initiative and is undertaking preparatory work on the necessary legislative amendments.

The Government will continue to expand the mutual market access programmes in a gradual manner in future and explore with the Mainland to further expand the scope of eligible securities.

[LCQ9: Management of Tenants Purchase Scheme estates](#)

Following is a question by the Hon Doreen Kong and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 18):

Question:

It has been reported that a number of Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) estates are quite old, and most of them are even provided with shopping malls, car parks and communal facilities. Some owners are worried that they need to bear huge maintenance expenses. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of TPS estates in respect of which major maintenance works are underway or are being planned, and the details; and

(2) whether the Hong Kong Housing Authority received, in the past five years, cases of complaints from owners of TPS estates or disputes among them about the management of the owners' corporations and the major maintenance works for the estates; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Doreen Kong is as follows:

There is no difference between Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) estates and other private properties in terms of property management. They are both subject to regulation of the Building Management Ordinance (BMO), relevant leases and Deeds of Mutual Covenant (DMCs). Pursuant to the provisions of the BMO and DMCs, Owners' Corporations (OCs) of TPS estates convene meetings of management committees or OCs' general meetings to discuss and decide on daily management matters.

At present, all TPS estates have already formed OCs, and have appointed their own property management companies (PMCs) to take up the management responsibility of the estates and to undertake the management and maintenance works of the common areas and facilities. As the owners of unsold flats of TPS estates, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA)'s representatives share their knowledge in day-to-day property management with OCs from time to time, and encourage OCs and their PMCs to maintain communications with owners, residents and the HA's tenants for effective management of their buildings. However, it is not appropriate for the HA to disclose information on maintenance work on behalf of the OCs. If any person has questions related to the management and maintenance issues of individual TPS estates, he/she can contact the OCs or the PMCs of respective estates directly and make enquiries.

As mentioned above, OCs of TPS estates are responsible for handling matters related to the management and maintenance of the estates. As such, enquires and complaints received by the HA from owners of TPS estates regarding the management of their estates will be referred to OCs for follow-up. In the past five years, the Housing Department received about 30 complaints from owners concerning the general day-to-day management matters of their estates, including burning incense in common area, maintenance of common facilities, water dripping from air-conditioners, performance of PMCs, etc. We have not received complaint or dispute case from owners concerning OCs' handling of major maintenance works.