

LCQ22: Manpower of Lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) employs not only civil service lifeguards but also non-civil service contract ("NCSC") lifeguards according to seasonal and operational needs for providing lifeguard services at its public swimming pools, gazetted beaches and water sports centres. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective strengths of the (i) civil service lifeguards and (ii) NCSC seasonal lifeguards under the LCSD at present, and their respective percentages in the relevant staffing establishments;

(2) of the total number of drowning cases which occurred at the public swimming pools, beaches and water sports centres under the LCSD in each of the past three years and, among such cases, the number of those in which the number of lifeguards on duty at the scenes at the relevant time was less than the relevant staffing establishment; and

(3) whether it has plans to expeditiously conduct a grade structure review for lifeguards and enhance the remuneration package of the grade, so as to retain lifeguards and attract new blood to the grade; if so, of the details and work schedule; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently provides aquatic or water sports facilities at 44 public swimming pools, 38 gazetted beaches and five water sports centres. My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Luk Chung-hung is as follows:

(1) The lifeguards employed by the LCSD include civil service lifeguards and seasonal lifeguards employed during the swimming season. As at June 1, 2021, there were 1 372 civil service lifeguards (including senior lifeguards) and 214 seasonal lifeguards in the LCSD. Details are at Annex I.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the LCSD's swimming pools were closed between December 2020 and March 2021. The selection interview and trade test for seasonal lifeguards for this year, originally scheduled during this period, were also suspended. As some public swimming pools and beaches have been reopened starting from April 2, 2021, the selection interview and trade test for seasonal lifeguards have been resumed. The recruitment exercise is being expedited and the appointed lifeguards will report for duty gradually.

(2) In the past three years from 2018-19 to 2020-21, there were a total of 219 rescue cases and seven drowning cases at the LCSD's public swimming pools, gazetted beaches and water sports centres at the time of service (see Annex II). When the incidents happened, there were sufficient lifeguards on duty at the public swimming pools and beaches involved. To ensure the safety of swimmers, the LCSD will provide sufficient lifeguards on duty at the public swimming pools while they are open for service as well as at gazetted beaches that are provided with lifeguard services.

(3) The lifeguards employed for providing lifesaving services at the LCSD's aquatic venues include lifeguards employed on a long-term basis and seasonal lifeguards employed during the swimming season. The former are mainly staff from the Artisan (Beach/Swimming Pool) (Ar(B/SP)) grade.

In accordance with the prevailing policy, the Government will only consider conducting a grade structure review for individual non-directorate civilian civil service grades when the following two criteria are met:

(a) the grades have proven and persistent recruitment and retention difficulties which cannot be resolved through the regular pay surveys under the "Improved Civil Service Pay Adjustment Mechanism"; or

(b) there are fundamental changes to the job nature, job complexity and level of responsibilities of the grades.

The LCSD has all along been adopting an open mind on conducting a structure review for the Ar(B/SP) grade. The LCSD is closely monitoring the recruitment situation this year with a view to gathering sufficient and objective data to explore the feasibility of initiating such review for the Ar(B/SP) grade.

[Hongkong Post to issue "Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(Hong Kong\)" commemorative stamps \(with photos\)](#)

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong) (SPCA) was founded in 1921. This long-standing animal welfare charity in Hong Kong promotes kindness to animals, protects their health and welfare, and prevents cruelty. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the SPCA since its inception, and Hongkong Post is issuing a set of commemorative stamps under the theme "Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

(Hong Kong)" on June 22 (Tuesday) to celebrate this special occasion. The commemorative stamps aim to spread the message of "Respect for life begins with concern for animals", as well as promoting harmony between humans and animals in the community.

This set of six commemorative stamps is in a style of oil painting in vibrant colours with a lively tone, to create a joyful atmosphere for the SPCA's centenary celebration. The stamps feature six animals, comprising a mongrel, a hamster, a red-eared slider, a rabbit, a domestic shorthair and a cockatiel, and each conveys a dedicated message.

The \$2 stamp portrays a mongrel, which stands for the effort the SPCA has put into raising the welfare of mongrels over the years, including medical care and behavioural training, so as to encourage more people to adopt mongrels as companion pets. A hamster is shown on the \$2.60 stamp, reminding public to care for all animals regardless of their species or size. The \$3.40 stamp shows a red-eared slider to alert people to the harmful impact on animals brought by inconsiderate mercy releases.

A rabbit is illustrated on the \$3.70 stamp, representing the SPCA's work in closely following up on complaints and assisting in investigations of suspected abuse cases to safeguard animal welfare and prevent animal abuse. On the \$4.90 stamp is a domestic shorthair. The SPCA strives to control the number of street cats and improve their welfare more humanely and sustainably by promoting street cat desexing through the "Cat Colony Care Programme". Lastly, a cockatiel is depicted on the \$5 stamp, advocating for "duty of care" and educating the public to take reasonable measures in looking after the welfare needs of animals.

On top of their commemorative and educational value, the philatelic products are also exquisitely designed. The most eye-catching product must be the presentation pack, which is designed to look like a birthday card, with colourful ribbons and flags on the cover and a pop-up illustration of animals wearing cute birthday hats on the inside, extending their congratulations to SPCA on its centenary.

The designs of the colour postmarks and the special postmark are noteworthy. The six colour postmarks, each featuring a paw or claw print of the six animals against warm background colours, are charming in their own way. In contrast, the special postmark presents the silhouettes of the six animals drawn in simple lines. The colour postmarks are only available in the set of six serviced first day covers and on the maximum cards, making them a must-have in any philatelic collection.

Starting from June 22, this set of commemorative stamps and associated philatelic products, including a first day cover, mint stamps, a souvenir sheet, a collector card, a presentation pack, postcards, maximum cards and serviced first day covers, will be placed on sale at post offices.

Information about this commemorative stamp issue and associated philatelic products is available on the Hongkong Post Stamps website (stamps.hongkongpost.hk) or the Hongkong Post mobile app.

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



Mint Stamps.



Special Postmark.



Souvenir Sheet.

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)

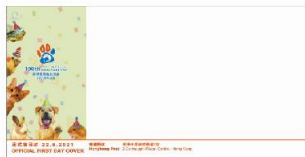


Collector Card (Front).



Collector Card (Back).

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



Blank First Day Cover.



Serviced First Day Cover affixed with a set of mint stamps in six denominations (date-stamped with special postmark).



Serviced First Day Cover affixed with a Souvenir Sheet (date-stamped with special postmark).

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



A set of six serviced First Day Covers each affixed with a stamp of different denomination (date-stamped with a corresponding colour postmark).



Colour Postmarks.

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



Presentation Pack (Cover).



Presentation Pack (Inside).

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



Postcards (a set of six cards).

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



A set of six cards each depicting one animal showed in the mint stamp and affixed with the corresponding mint stamp on the picture side (date-stamped with special postmark).

Centenary of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong)



A set of six cards each depicting one animal showed in the mint stamp and affixed with the corresponding mint stamp on the picture side (date-stamped with a corresponding colour postmark).

LCQ21: The Square Kilometre Array Project

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Project is an international astronomy science project, with the objective to build the world's largest aperture synthesis radio telescope array and operate it for 50 years, which will provide a major opportunity for mankind to understand the universe. "The Square Kilometre Array Observatory" (SKAO), an international intergovernmental organisation established by a number of countries, is responsible for the implementation of the SKA Project. Following the ratification of the Convention establishing the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (the Convention) by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in April this year, China has become an official member of SKAO. On the other hand, the Chinese Government has announced that the Convention is not applicable to Hong Kong for the time being. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed and consulted local academics how Hong Kong's participation in the SKA Project may benefit the local academia's research in areas such as astronomy, physics, frontier science as well as innovation and technology; if so, of the outcome; if not, whether it will expeditiously conduct such an assessment;

(2) whether it has estimated the resources that Hong Kong needs to deploy for participating in the SKA Project; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will make such an estimation; and

(3) whether it has plans to discuss with the Central Authorities the application of the Convention to Hong Kong, so that Hong Kong may participate in the SKA Project; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

According to information from the website of the Square Kilometre Array Project (SKA Project), the SKA Project plans to build radio telescopes in Australia and South Africa, and conduct scientific researches on issues such as the formation and evolution of stars and galaxies, cosmic magnetism, nature of gravity and life beyond Earth.

As instructed by the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau would reply to the question on behalf of the Administration as follows:

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region did not conduct assessments on the issues described in the question, and also has no plan to conduct such assessments.

The Convention establishing the Square Kilometre Array Observatory (Convention) is not applicable to Hong Kong. The Government has no plan to request the application of the Convention to Hong Kong.

LCQ13: Initiative to reform Old Age Living Allowances

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

The Normal Old Age Living Allowance and the Higher Old Age Living Allowance are currently pitched at \$2,845 and \$3,815 per month respectively. In January last year, the Government proposed a reform initiative: combining the two allowances with the higher payment rate to be adopted, and raising the asset limits for elderly singletons and elderly couples to \$500,000 and \$750,000 respectively. Nevertheless, the Government stated in November last year in the Supplement to the 2020 Policy Address that in light of the financial implications of the initiative, the Government would reassess the timing of implementing the initiative. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details, progress and outcome of the reassessment work; whether revising the proposed asset limits is within the scope of the reassessment work; if so, of the details and justifications, as well as whether it will consider further raising the asset limits; and

(2) whether it has set an implementation date for the initiative; if so, of the details; if not, whether the Government intends to give up implementing the initiative; if so, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the Member's question is as follows:

In January 2020, the Chief Executive (CE) announced a number of livelihood initiatives, including the proposals of combining the Normal Old

Age Living Allowance (OALA) and the Higher OALA and adopting the higher payment rate (the Normal OALA currently at \$2,845 per month and the Higher OALA at \$3,815 per month), as well as relaxing the asset limits of the OALA significantly, viz. from \$365,000 under the Normal OALA or \$159,000 under the Higher OALA to \$500,000 for elderly singletons, and from \$554,000 under the Normal OALA or \$241,000 under the Higher OALA to \$750,000 for elderly couples after standardising the payment rate. The two proposed enhancements involve significant recurrent expenditure. It is estimated that the Government's recurrent expenditure on the OALA will increase from about \$30 billion to \$35 billion per year, i.e. by \$5 billion or a 16 per cent increase. The Government also requires substantial administrative and staffing resources to cope with the significant increase in number of applications.

Subsequently, the CE announced in the 2020 Policy Address Supplement that, in light of the significant financial implications of the two aforementioned the OALA enhancements, the timing of implementation will be reassessed. Therefore, the additional resources and expenditure required for implementing the two measures have not been included in the Social Welfare Department's 2021-22 Estimates of Expenditure.

Given Hong Kong's population ageing will continue and the two measures will involve significant recurrent expenditure, the present and projected Government's overall fiscal position is to be taken into account in the assessment. The Government will announce the assessment outcome at an appropriate juncture.

Open auction for public market stalls to start from June 21

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) announced today (June 9) that in order to put vacant stalls in public markets into more effective use and to provide job opportunities for the grassroots, an open auction for a total of 304 vacant stalls in 36 public markets will be held from June 21 (Monday).

The retail commodities allowed for sale in these stalls cover non-food related dry or wet goods and food related dry or wet goods, etc. The tenancy agreement is a one-year fixed term from July this year, with no right of renewal upon expiry of the tenancy agreement. Depending on the size and location of individual stalls, the upset price of the monthly rent of the stalls ranges from \$520 to \$13,500. Tenants can enjoy a reduction of the monthly rental by 75 per cent from July to September this year.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "Bidders for the market stalls must be at least 18 years old and ordinarily reside in Hong Kong. To allow more people

to bid for the stalls and increase customer choices by enhancing the diversity in terms of variety of stalls, there will be a limit on the number of stalls to be rented by a single tenant. No person who is renting a stall under the one-year short term tenancy scheme is allowed to rent more than one stall of a one-year short term tenancy in the same market. Also, any person who is currently a stall tenant is not allowed to bid in the first round of auction for any stalls in the same market, but will only be allowed to bid on one stall in the second round of auction."

The open auction for public market stalls in the New Territories East, the New Territories West, Hong Kong Island/Islands and Kowloon will be held at the Assembly Hall, 2/F of the Lai Chi Kok Government Offices, 19 Lai Wan Road, Lai Chi Kok, Kowloon, from June 21 to 25 correspondingly. To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, persons entering the auction venue are required to pay attention to and comply with the preventive measures implemented at the auction venue, including temperature checks before admission and mask wearing at all times. Meanwhile, the maximum capacity of the auction venue is 200 persons. The FEHD will issue same-day entry tickets 30 minutes prior to the commencement of each session of the auctions. Persons entering the auction venue are required to present a valid entry ticket. Subject to the ground situation, the FEHD may advance or postpone the time of issuing entry tickets.

Details of the auction of public market stalls will be uploaded to the FEHD website (www.fehd.gov.hk). Bidders interested in the auction may visit the department's website or contact the respective District Environmental Hygiene Office.