

LCQ18: Estate offices of public rental housing

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 24):

Question:

Some residents of public rental housing (PRH) have relayed that the estate office of the estate in which they live has adopted improper practices. For example, in respect of the work on vetting and approval of the publicity materials to be posted by mutual aid committees and enforcing the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement, the judgements made and the way of handling by the estate offices concerned are inappropriate and are different from those by other estate offices. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Housing Department (HD) has issued practice guidelines to its estate offices; if so, (i) whether HD has regularly updated such guidelines, and (ii) whether PRH residents may have access to such guidelines; if so, whether HD received complaints in the past three years about the violation of such guidelines by estate offices; if so, of the number of complaints, with a breakdown by year and subject of complaint; and

(2) whether HD has regularly deployed staff to inspect its estate offices (especially those against which relatively more complaints have been lodged); if so, of the details; if not, the measures put in place to monitor the work of the estate offices and ensure that they act strictly in accordance with HD's directions and guidelines?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Wilson Or is as follows:

(1) Each public rental housing (PRH) estate under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has an estate management office (EMO). Some of the EMOs are directly managed by the Housing Department (HD), some are managed by staff of outsourced management companies. HA has promulgated guidelines on various management work (including handling of applications for display of publicity materials (PMs) and execution of the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement (the Marking Scheme) in PRH estates) for implementation by staff of the EMOs. The relevant vetting principles on the display of PMs (including poster, banner, etc.) in PRH estates and information about the Marking Scheme can be browsed at HA's website (note).

Regarding the display of PMs, applications are generally handled by EMOs in accordance with the relevant guidelines. PMs should be informative, the content of which should be welfare- or service-providing and non-profit-making in nature. They should not carry messages that are unlawful, obscene, defamatory, insinuating, criticising or denouncing individual persons or parties. To ensure consistency among EMOs on the principles of handling PMs, EMOs should refer applications for PMs with controversial content to the HD Headquarters for handling. Applicants may lodge an appeal if they are not satisfied with the way the applications are handled. In addition, notice boards (NBs) are provided in some PRH estates for the exclusive use of district council members/legislative councillors and local residents' groups (including mutual aid committees, residents' associations, etc.), or non-governmental organisations. Contents of the PMs displayed on these NBs should also comply with the aforementioned principles. EMO staff will inspect these NBs regularly and, depending on the actual situation, take necessary follow-up actions.

We do not have a central record of the number of complaints against EMOs of non-compliance with the guidelines for handling PMs and the Marking Scheme. Individual complaints will be followed up and handled in accordance with the HD's prevailing mechanism. HA will review the estate management policies from time to time in the light of changing social circumstances.

(2) Each EMO is supervised by their respective HD Regional Management Offices. If HD is aware that individual EMO does not comply with the various estate management guidelines promulgated by HD, HD will assign staff to follow up and increase the frequency of supervisory checks on the relevant EMO.

Note:

Arrangements on Display of PMs and Arrangements on Electioneering Activities during Election Period

www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/common/pdf/about-us/policy-focus/policies-on-public-housing/B27/B27.pdf

Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement

www.housingauthority.gov.hk/en/public-housing/estate-management/marking-scheme-for-estate-management-enforcement/index.html

LCQ15: Supporting street sleepers amid the epidemic

Following is a question by the Hon Martin Liao and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (February 24):

Question:

It has been reported that some street sleepers have recently been confirmed, one after another, to have been infected with the Coronavirus Disease 2019. As revealed by a survey conducted by a grassroots concern group and some media reports, the number of street sleepers has surged amid the epidemic. Among the street sleepers, quite a number of them have become street sleepers for the first time upon losing their jobs or are Hong Kong people who originally resided on the Mainland and have moved back to Hong Kong. Some children are even found street-sleeping with their family members. The situation of street sleepers is made more difficult under the stringent anti-epidemic measures. For example, some voluntary organisations have reduced the distribution of food and materials, street sleepers gathering and sleeping in the streets for mutual care may be in breach of the "No-gathering Order", and the closure of some public shower facilities has reduced the places available for street sleepers to keep their personal hygiene. The relevant situation has aroused social concern. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed the risks of street sleepers contracting the epidemic disease and spreading it to the community, and whether it has put in place special support measures to help them fight against the epidemic, so as to protect their health and that of the relevant communities;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the monthly numbers of street sleepers since the outbreak of the epidemic in December 2019 (and among them, the respective numbers of those who have become street sleepers for the first time upon losing their jobs and those who have moved back from the Mainland), and the main reasons leading to their street sleeping;

(3) whether it has found underage street sleepers; if so, whether it will take special measures to provide them with appropriate support; and

(4) of the respective numbers of street sleepers of new cases, since January 2020, who have been arranged to be admitted to residential places subvented by the Social Welfare Department and those operated by non-governmental organizations on a self-financing basis, and the number of street sleepers who have extricated themselves from street sleeping upon receiving other assistance?

Reply:

President,

With regard to the Member's question, having consulted the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), I set out the reply as follows:

(1) Street sleeping is a complex social problem involving policies and work of various bureaux and departments. Concerned government departments and local service units have been in close collaboration to assist street sleepers.

According to the information provided by the FHB, since street sleepers

would generally use public bathhouses or public toilets more frequently, eat and rest in places with relatively poor environmental hygiene conditions and might not be equipped with or use appropriate protective gear, they might be more susceptible to infection. The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health has enhanced collaboration with the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Home Affairs Department and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in tracing confirmed cases involving street sleepers and strengthening anti-epidemic education, etc.

The SWD provides subvention to NGOs to operate three Integrated Service Teams (ISTs) for Street Sleepers. Through outreaching services, ISTs reach out to street sleepers for early identification of welfare needs and service referral. During the pandemic, ISTs continued to conduct outreaching visits so as to identify the social welfare needs of street sleepers and provide them with the services required, including dissemination of up-to-date pandemic-related information and distribution of protective gear. ISTs could make use of the SWD's emergency fund for meeting the urgent needs of street sleepers as and when required. In addition, to assist welfare units to step up preventive measures against the spread of the virus, the SWD has provided four rounds of special allowance to subvented NGOs (including service units serving street sleepers) and NGOs operating hostels for street sleepers on a self-financing basis to purchase personal protective equipment and disinfection supplies.

(2) According to the information collected by SWD-subvented NGOs which provide services to street sleepers, there were about 1 500 street sleepers in 2020, and the main reason for street sleeping was the inability to pay rent. The SWD does not have information on the monthly statistics on the number of street sleepers, number of persons who have become street sleepers for the first time upon losing their jobs and street sleepers who have moved back from the Mainland.

(3) ISTs have not reported any cases of street sleeper being a minor. If any such cases are found, ISTs will make referral to relevant social service units or departments for follow up in accordance with the case situation and service needs.

(4) In 2020, the cumulative number of admissions for residential service in emergency/temporary shelters/hostels/short-term hostels subvented by the SWD was 523, and the utilisation rate was 78 per cent. The number of cases having given up street sleeping after receiving support and follow-up from ISTs was 299 in the same year. The SWD does not have information on cases who have given up street sleeping after admittance to residential places operated by NGOs on a self-financing basis and receipt of other assistance.

Budget Speech by the Financial Secretary (5)

Stimulating the Economy

Positioning and Directions for Economic Development

Assessment of Situation

53. Hong Kong has been leveraging the support from the Mainland while engaging the world. Over the past many years, we have been utilising our advantages in institutions, talents and external connections, and served as a bridge between our country and the rest of the world in different ways in response to our country's ever-changing needs. By doing so, Hong Kong has contributed to national development and at the same time promoted its own development and economic growth. Only by making good use of the advantages of "One Country, Two Systems" with the precondition of strengthening national security can we continue to play and even enhance our role on this front.

54. Over the past two years, Hong Kong has been affected by the deterioration of the China-US relations, and experienced the blow from the social incidents and the ravages of the pandemic. However, we should not let these challenges weaken our confidence in the future. Instead, we should learn from the experience and make correct assessment of the major development trends.

55. First, the world is facing profound changes unseen in a century. The economic gravity is shifting from West to East, and the political setting has also seen subtle changes. Our country's composite national strength has enhanced significantly, while other developing countries in Asia have undergone robust development. However, with the rise of unilateralism in recent years and the misunderstandings of some western countries towards Hong Kong's developments, we are facing greater difficulties. The epidemic has increased various countries' concerns about development security, which might further escalate protectionism. Some nations encourage or even ask enterprises to move back to their home countries, impacting on the development and setting of global value chains.

56. Second, the world is facing drastic disruptions brought by technological revolution, which have far-reaching implications for our personal life, modes of production and operation, economic structures, development prospects and international landscape. The pandemic has also accelerated changes in the mode of business operation and people's living habits. Making good use of digital technology is not only essential to effective business operation, but also crucial for preventing and combating the pandemic and protecting public health and safety. Whether a place can attain a leading position in I&T will determine its success or failure.

57. Third, green development is a major global trend. Environmental

pollution and climate change have become too serious to ignore. There is a general recognition in the international community that we should promote green and low-carbon development, which involves extensive new areas. The Government needs to have visions and determination; the people need to build awareness of environmental protection and corresponding habits; the business sector needs to develop and adopt novel technologies, and launch products of high efficiency. Other matching services such as financial support are also needed.

58. Fourth, as for Hong Kong, we have experienced many changes at different points in our history, but the support of our country has remained unchanged. With the advantages under “One Country, Two Systems”, Hong Kong has a unique and irreplaceable role in the national development.

Functions and Positioning

59. With its deep and extensive connections with the world, Hong Kong will continue to be an important platform for economic exchanges and trade between the Mainland and the international community. As mentioned in the Proposal for Formulating the National 14th Five-Year Plan, our country supports Hong Kong in consolidating and bolstering our competitive edges, building the city as an international I&T hub, fostering the development of the city as a B&R functional platform, and achieving diversified and sustainable development of the economy. With our country’s support, we can further capitalise on our advantages and realise our potential. We must step up our efforts to explore international economic and trade opportunities and actively participate in national development through making use of our industries with competitive strengths.

60. Hong Kong has prominent functional roles in various aspects such as pooling international capital and talent, and providing a platform to align our country’s standards with the international ones. In addition, Hong Kong serves as a testing ground and firewall in our country’s promotion of financial sector reform and opening up (such as the internationalisation of Renminbi (RMB)). Under our country’s dual circulation development strategy, Hong Kong will definitely achieve greater success in the future as long as we can give full play to our unique roles as a gateway, a springboard and an intermediary.

61. Leveraging our close proximity, Hong Kong can make use of the GBA development as an entry point, participating actively in the development of our country’s domestic circulation for capturing the enormous business opportunities. As an international metropolis that connects the world, Hong Kong can help the expansion of the country’s external circulation, and in consequence further strengthen its status as an international centre for finance, commerce and trade, as well as a home for corporate headquarters.

62. In the face of rising unilateralism, it is all the more important for us to actively promote multilateralism, dismantle various barriers and strengthen Hong Kong’s links with the international community. We should further expand Hong Kong’s trade, investment and tax agreement networks. The Free Trade Agreement and the Investment Agreement between Hong Kong and the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations have recently come into full effect. In November last year, our country signed the RCEP Agreement with 14 economies. We are actively seeking to be among the first batch of economies joining the RCEP after it comes into effect, so as to help Hong Kong businesses and investors open up markets, thereby fostering the long-term economic development of Hong Kong.

The Way Forward for Industries

63. From the perspective of industries, Hong Kong has huge development potential in areas including financial services, I&T, green economy, air cargo, supply chain management and professional services. Financial services are an important support to the real economy. On top of being a leading asset and wealth management centre, Hong Kong is also an international fundraising platform, an insurance and risk management centre and an offshore RMB hub. Our financial services can assist Mainland enterprises in raising funds, and provide outlets and risk management for Mainland funds, as well as facilitating the Mainland's ongoing financial liberalisation in a secure and orderly manner in support of the development of our country's real economy. We must continue to strengthen Hong Kong's leading position in the global financial market.

64. Hong Kong enjoys a number of advantages in I&T development, such as top-notch capabilities in basic scientific research, intellectual property rights protection, attractiveness to research talents from all over the world and first-class financial support services. In recent years, the Government has allocated substantial resources and implemented a number of preferential policies, and been blessed with our country's support. As long as we can leverage our advantages and achieve co-ordinated development with our brother cities that have advanced manufacturing industries in the GBA, we can form an I&T upstream, midstream and downstream industrial chain and develop the GBA into an international I&T centre, thus contributing to our country's technological self-reliance and at the same time identifying new areas of growth for Hong Kong's economy.

65. Nowadays, when everyone is striving to live a quality life, decarbonisation, waste reduction, building of a green environment and a sustainable city, etc. have become a social consensus. The international community, including our country and the European Union, have set achieving carbon neutrality as an important development goal. A significant synergy effect can be generated between green economy and other industries such as the I&T and financial sectors. Our robust green and sustainable financial services can contribute to the development of green economy in the Mainland and Hong Kong.

66. Hong Kong is a world-class logistics and supply chain management centre. With a well-established network of air routes, a highly efficient airport as well as simple and fast customs clearance procedures, Hong Kong's air cargo transport sector plays a leading role in the world. We will strive to enhance our intermodal transportation services in the future, with a view to increasing the global accessibility of the GBA. This will facilitate not only the exports of goods from the GBA to overseas markets, but also the

imports of quality products from around the world to the Mainland, meeting the increasing consumer demands there. Technology is reshaping the interplay between the supply of goods and the demand of consumers, and the prospects for our high-end logistics and supply chain management services are bright.

67. As our country seeks to achieve high-quality development, the demand for various types of professional services such as legal, accounting, construction and project management services is on the rise. These areas are where our strengths lie. Hong Kong's professionals can provide services in a market full of opportunities, and also promote the alignment of industry standards in the Mainland with those of the international community.

68. Apart from the above industries, there is also a growing demand for inclusion of cultural and creative elements in the cyber world. I will allocate additional resources to promote the development of cultural and creative industries, so that young people can have more employment and business start-up opportunities for unleashing their potential and realising their dreams.

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

69. As mentioned earlier, the GBA is the best entry point for Hong Kong to participate in the domestic circulation of our country's economy. Be it for the mutual market access for financial services and products, cooperation and collaboration in respect of innovation and technology, or people's stay and living across the boundary, continued innovation in institutional and policy arrangement is needed so as to ensure a smoother two-way flow of funds, people and factors of production. The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development Office has been set up to strengthen the planning, coordination and promotion of the various policies and measures relating to GBA development, and enhance the community's understanding of GBA development. The Government also helps Hong Kong's businesses and youths to grasp the opportunities arising from GBA development through various schemes.

Belt and Road

70. Our country has signed cooperation agreements with about 170 countries and international organisations regarding the B&R initiative. The Government will continue to provide financing services to B&R infrastructure projects through leveraging Hong Kong's function as an international financial centre, encourage Hong Kong enterprises and professional services sectors to develop business in the overseas Economic and Trade Co-operation Zones set up by our country, and establish connections with Mainland enterprises and industry associations for jointly exploring new markets, thereby consolidating Hong Kong's role as a prime functional platform and key node for the B&R Initiative.

(To be continued.)

Immediate adjustment to first registration tax rates for private cars

The Government announced in the Gazette today (February 24) that the following adjusted first registration tax (FRT) rates for private cars (PCs) take effect from 11am on February 24, 2021 (Hong Kong time):

	Original tax rates	Adjusted tax rates
Private car taxable value:		
(a) on the first \$150,000	40%	46%
(b) on the next \$150,000	75%	86%
(c) on the next \$200,000	100%	115%
(d) on the remainder	115%	132%

Concurrently, the FRT concession cap under the "One-for-One Replacement" Scheme for electric private cars (e-PCs) has been adjusted from \$250,000 to \$287,500 so as to continue promoting the use of electric vehicles, whereas the FRT concession cap for e-PCs in general is maintained at the present level of \$97,500.

"There will be no change to the tax rates of the other classes of motor vehicles and the application procedures for the first registration remain unchanged. Moreover, for PCs ordered/arranged to import into Hong Kong by the vehicle owners for personal use before 11am on February 24, 2021 (Hong Kong time), but have not been first registered, so long as the local registered distributors/registered importers/vehicle owners submit an application with relevant supporting documents to the Transport Department (TD) for exemption from paying FRT at the new tax rates, subject to the application being approved by the TD after verification, the old FRT rates will be applicable to the PC concerned," a spokesman for the TD said.

"If the PC concerned is approved to pay FRT at the old rates and granted with the FRT concession under the 'One-for-One Replacement' Scheme at the same time, it can only enjoy the old FRT concession cap under the Scheme, i.e. \$250,000," the spokesman added.

For enquiries, members of the public can call 1823 or the TD's Hong Kong Licensing Office at 2804 2637.

Immediate adjustment to annual licence fees of vehicle licences for private cars and electrically powered passenger vehicles

The Government gazetted today (February 24) the adjustments of the annual licence fees of vehicle licences for private cars and electrically powered passenger vehicles with effect from 11am (Hong Kong Time) on February 24, 2021. The annual licence fees of vehicle licences for other vehicle classes remain unchanged. The adjusted annual licence fees of vehicle licences for private cars and electrically powered passenger vehicles are tabulated below:

Petrol and diesel private cars

Cylinder capacity of engine	Adjusted annual licence fees of vehicle licences*		Adjusted licence fees of 4-month vehicle licences*	
	Petrol	Diesel#	Petrol	Diesel#
Not exceeding 1 500 cubic centimetres	\$5,074	\$6,972	\$1,804	\$2,469
Exceeds 1 500 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 2 500 cubic centimetres	\$7,498	\$9,396	\$2,653	\$3,317
Exceeds 2 500 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 3 500 cubic centimetres	\$9,929	\$11,827	\$3,504	\$4,168
Exceeds 3 500 cubic centimetres but does not exceed 4 500 cubic centimetres	\$12,360	\$14,258	\$4,355	\$5,019
Exceeds 4 500 cubic centimetres	\$14,694	\$16,592	\$5,171	\$5,836

* Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Fund Levy included. The levy for one year is \$114, and the levy for four months is \$38.

If private car uses fuel of light diesel oil as defined in section 69 of the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance (Cap. 109), the additional fee required has been adjusted to \$1,898.

Electrically powered passenger vehicles

Unladen weight	Adjusted annual licence fees of vehicle licences ^	Adjusted licence fees of 4-
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Not exceeding 1 tonne; and	\$572	\$30 + 35% of adjusted annual vehicle licences
An additional fee for each 250 kilograms unladen weight or part thereof	\$124	

^ Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Fund Levy not included. The levy for one year is \$114, and the levy for four months is \$38.

For the adjustment on annual licence fees of vehicle licences, the Transport Department (TD) has implemented special arrangements for renewal of vehicle licences. Members of the public renewing their vehicle licences of private cars or electrically powered passenger vehicles which expire on or before June 23, 2021, as long as the renewal application is submitted on or before June 23, 2021, they can continue to pay the original annual licence fees before the adjustment. If members of the public renew the vehicle licences of private cars and electrically powered passenger vehicles which expire on or after June 24, 2021, or submit applications for first or re-issue of vehicle licences of private cars or electrically powered passenger vehicles at or after 11am (Hong Kong time) of February 24, 2021, they must pay the adjusted annual licence fees.

For enquiries, members of the public can call 1823 or the TD's enquiry hotline 2804 2600.