

## LCQ6: Anti-epidemic measures

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

Some members of the public have criticised that since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, the anti-epidemic measures promulgated by the Government from time to time were of a great variety, with some of them even taking effect within a short period of time. As such, the general public failed to keep abreast of such measures and act accordingly. On the contrary, the Government of the United Kingdom (UK) has put in place a four-tiered alert system for the COVID-19 epidemic and stipulated the anti-epidemic measures that the public and society must take under each tier of alert. For instance, when Tier 4 alert comes into force, the public are not allowed to go out unless necessary, all non-essential retail outlets must close, etc. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will, by following the practice of the UK Government, put in place a tiered alert system for the COVID-19 epidemic and stipulate the anti-epidemic measures that members of the public must take when different tiers of alert come into force; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the current maximum total number of COVID-19 tests that can be conducted daily by public and private laboratories; whether it has assessed if Hong Kong currently has enough testing capacity to implement universal compulsory testing; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, whether it has plans to increase the testing capacity and the number of specimen collection points; and

(3) given that the Government issues compulsory testing notices from time to time to require persons who were present on specified premises during specified periods to undergo COVID-19 tests, whether the Government will draw up clear guidelines and criteria for the relevant arrangements and improve the dissemination of information, so as to facilitate members of the public to understand in a more convenient and quicker manner (i) whether they are persons subject to compulsory testing, and (ii) the ways for undergoing testing; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong has been extensively affected by COVID-19, a pandemic sweeping across the world. In view of the unstable situation of the epidemic, we should not let our guard down. Recently, there is a resurgence of confirmed

cases or clusters of infection without a known source in the community. The epidemic is on the brink of another wave of outbreak. It is therefore essential for us to take all necessary measures to strengthen epidemic control by guarding against the importation of cases and the resurgence of domestic infections, and to further enhance the precision of the control measures to be taken in a bid to achieve the target of "zero infection" with the support and cooperation of the general public.

In consultation with the Home Affairs Bureau, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Alice Mak is as follows:

(1) The Government launched the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance (the Plan) on January 4, 2020. The Plan sets out the Government's preparedness and response plan in case of an outbreak of COVID-19 so that different government departments and organisations can respond according to the agreed and coordinated efforts with an aim to reducing the mortality and morbidity of the Hong Kong population due to novel infection. Furthermore, the Plan also serves as a tool for clear communication of the level of risk with the public. The Plan includes three response levels – Alert, Serious and Emergency. These response levels are based on risk assessment of COVID-19 that may affect Hong Kong and may be activated based on its health impact on the community.

On January 25, 2020, the Government raised the response level to the highest level of Emergency.

The Government will assess the risk from time to time in view of the latest scientific evidence and development, activate or deactivate the response level and implement corresponding anti-epidemic measures.

(2) We have been implementing anti-epidemic measures such as virus testing, contact tracing and social distancing in accordance with the principle of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment", with a view to preventing the spread of the virus in the community. The World Health Organization (WHO) and health experts around the globe have pointed out that COVID-19 will not vanish without an effective treatment method and vaccine. In fact, even if we start vaccination this year, the vaccine will not be able to completely prevent the spread of the virus in a short period of time. Therefore, our current virus testing strategy is to continue and expand compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, targeted testing on an obligatory basis and testing on a voluntary basis. As such, specified persons of high risk are required to undergo compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, targeted groups are arranged to undergo testing on an obligatory basis, and we also encourage members of the public to undergo voluntary testing to achieve voluntary testing on a large scale.

To tie in with the above strategy, the Government has been stepping up surveillance and testing efforts in a multi-pronged approach. The current maximum daily testing capacity of public and private laboratories has been substantially increased to approximately 100 000 tests per day (without sample pooling). Through various channels of specimen collection, the

Government can collect samples from a maximum of about 80 000 members of the public for testing each day.

On whether universal compulsory testing should be conducted, if it were to be effectively implemented, it must be complemented by comprehensive lockdown. It is questionable whether local citizens and businesses are willing to accept a comprehensive lockdown; and even so, the supply of daily necessities is another issue. We are of the view that the present precision-guided anti-epidemic measures which focus primarily on compulsory testing for people of high-risk groups, complemented by broadened and more convenient voluntary testing for the public, constitute a more appropriate strategy.

(3) Since the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) came into operation on November 15, 2020, the Government has exercised the power under the regulation multiple times to issue compulsory testing notices with a view to fully implementing the virus testing strategy of compulsory testing on a mandatory basis. This includes requiring persons who had been to specified premises (including dance clubs/venues, restaurants, residential buildings, construction sites, department store and hospitals); symptomatic persons; staff members of residential care homes for the elderly, residential care homes for persons with disabilities and nursing homes, day service units attached to the premises of residential care homes; and taxi drivers to undergo compulsory testing.

In order to cut the transmission chain in the community as soon as possible, the Government has also actively expanded the coverage of compulsory testing on a mandatory basis especially for residential buildings to achieve community clearing. With effect from December 30, 2020, if there are two or more units in a building with confirmed cases in the past 14 days and the units concerned are not epidemiologically linked to each other, the building would be included in the compulsory testing notice under Cap. 599J and persons who had been present at that building for more than two hours in the past 14 days are required to undergo compulsory testing.

To facilitate persons covered under the compulsory testing notices to undergo testing, the Government not only provides free testing services in 19 community testing centres, but also arranges testing service providers to set up mobile specimen collection stations in the vicinity of these buildings to provide free and convenient testing services for them. Persons subject to compulsory testing can also choose to undergo free COVID-19 testing through other channels, which include obtaining a deep throat saliva specimen collection pack from any of the 188 distribution points (i.e. 47 designated general outpatient clinics of the Hospital Authority, 121 post offices, and vending machines at 20 MTR stations), and return the specimen to one of the designated specimen collection points. The Government will announce information on compulsory testing notices, including the categories of persons subject to compulsory testing and testing channels, through press releases and upload the information onto the "COVID-19 Thematic Website": [www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/compulsory-testing.html](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/compulsory-testing.html) and [www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html](http://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/early-testing.html).

In addition, District Offices have maintained close contact with local residents in different areas of respective districts and provided them with relevant information and appropriate assistance on how to comply with the compulsory testing notices and undergo testing via different routes before the testing deadline. After the issue of compulsory testing notices, District Offices will contact testing contractors to help them set up mobile specimen collection stations at appropriate locations. District Offices will first distribute notices to affected households and display notices in the public areas of the buildings to remind them to visit the mobile specimen collection stations or nearby testing facilities to undergo testing within the specified period. District Offices will also set up counters at mobile specimen collection stations and/or the main entrance of buildings to register residents who have undergone or will undergo compulsory testing, and contact and urge those who have not yet registered to undergo testing as soon as possible. If necessary, with the assistance of the Housing Department, the Hong Kong Housing Society, relevant Owners' Corporations or property management companies, District Offices will conduct home visits to urge residents not yet tested to undergo testing as soon as possible, and contact the Department of Health or the Social Welfare Department to provide appropriate assistance to persons with special needs (such as the elderly and disabled persons with poor health or walking difficulties).

---

## **LCQ8: Heritage conservation work**

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

Earlier on, the Government decided, on grounds of safety, to demolish a disused underground cistern at Bishop Hill in Sham Shui Po. When the demolition works were in progress last month, some residents discovered that the cistern had distinctive architectural features, including an array of Romanesque stone pillars and red-brick arches inside the cistern. Subsequently, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) halted the demolition works, and confirmed that the cistern had been completed as early as in 1904. Later on, the Government admitted that the WSD had consulted the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) in 2017 on the proposed demolition works, but the latter had decided, on the understanding that the cistern was an ordinary water tank, that no grading exercise was required, thus leaving this heritage structure on the brink of complete destruction. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the WSD, in consulting the AMO on the cistern in 2017, furnished

- the AMO with information such as relevant building plans, photos, the year of construction and historical records;
- (2) as a number of waterworks installations have been declared monuments, and the Red Brick Building (a pumping station in Yau Ma Tei which, same as the cistern, previously formed part of the water supply system of Kowloon) has also been accorded Grade 1 historic building status, why the AMO, without making in-depth verification and conducting a site inspection, came to the understanding in 2017 that the cistern was an ordinary water tank;
- (3) given that four stone pillars and part of the upper structure of the cistern have been demolished, whether the authorities have gathered and retained all the demolished materials for use in the restoration works as necessary;
- (4) as the Secretary for Development has earlier on stated that experts will be arranged within three months to assess the historic value of the cistern so that the Antiquities Advisory Board may give a grading to the cistern in March this year, whether the relevant work can be expedited;
- (5) whether it will conduct public consultation on the long-term conservation options for the cistern, and invite related professional bodies to give views on matters such as revitalisation of the cistern and utilisation of the space;
- (6) whether it will consider opening up the cistern, upon completion of the necessary strengthening and maintenance works and before the implementation of the conservation option, with restrictions for visit by members of the public and tourists who have made appointments;
- (7) as the WSD has, in response to media enquiries, advised that the two fresh water service reservoirs located at Magazine Gap Road in the Mid-level and Hatton Road at the Peak, both with a history of over a century, were demolished in 2010 and 2011 one after another, of the construction history and architectural features of these two service reservoirs, together with the details of as well as the vetting and approval procedures for the relevant demolition works;
- (8) whether it will ask various bureaux and government departments to draw up a list of all the pre-war buildings under their management and, for those buildings among them which are under planning for demolition and may have higher historic and architectural values, submit the relevant information expeditiously to the AMO for detailed reviews; and
- (9) whether it has learnt a lesson from this incident and whether it will take improvement measures, including expanding the definition of "buildings" that need to be graded and reviewing the communication process between the AMO and other government departments?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the Hon Tony Tse's question is as follows:

(1) Pursuant to records, the waterworks installation at Bishop Hill at Sham Shui Po was built in 1904 and decommissioned in 1970. As cracks were observed at the roof slabs of the waterworks installation, it posed a potential safety hazard. In 2013, the Water Supplies Department (WSD) engaged a reservoir safety expert to inspect and assess the condition of the waterworks installation. The expert confirmed that there was a safety problem at the roof structure. As there were records of frequent trespassing in the surrounding areas and on the roof top of the waterworks installation, to ensure public safety, the WSD planned to demolish that installation and return the site to the Lands Department for other uses. In April 2017, the WSD consulted the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) on the demolition works, pointing out that the waterworks installation was not stable and provided information about its structural safety.

(2) The prevailing system for grading historic buildings is devised to assess the heritage value of usual buildings and structures. After deliberation at its meeting held in March 2017, the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) decided to put those items that do not fall under the usual category of buildings/structures, such as cemetery and stone tablet, into the "List of Items Not Falling Under the Usual Category of Buildings/Structures". Grading assessment would not be conducted for items falling into this list for the time being such that the AAB could focus on the study of other items. This list includes a water tank of an earlier period which is movable and not suitable for grading assessment. Since the March 2017 meeting, the AAB and the AMO have been handling items of the same nature as those on the list in the same manner in accordance with the AAB's decision mentioned above.

In April 2017, the WSD consulted the AMO on the site works of the waterworks installation. The AMO considered at the time that no follow-up action was required on the understanding that the water facilities in the site is a water tank, based on the information provided then as well as its communication with the WSD, and in accordance with the AAB's decision in March of the same year.

(3) The WSD commenced the temporary strengthening and tidying up works for the waterworks installation on January 5. The works include sorting and protection of structural elements taken down earlier to facilitate future rehabilitation.

(4) The AMO has commenced an in-depth research on the heritage value of the waterworks installation, including carrying out the study of this item with reference to the six prevailing assessment criteria, namely historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity. To this end, the AMO will conduct site inspections, photographic recording and an extensive sourcing and analysis of first-hand information, drawn from local and overseas archives as well as from the WSD. It will also comprehensively review secondary sources such as the relevant

researches, journal articles and publications. Upon completion of the in-depth research, the AMO will submit the appraisal to the independent Historic Buildings Assessment Panel (Assessment Panel) for examination and recommendation of a proposed grading for the waterworks installation against the aforesaid six assessment criteria. The AMO is striving submit the appraisal and the Assessment Panel's proposed grading to the AAB for consideration and grading assessment in the first quarter of 2021. When the AAB endorses the proposed grading of the waterworks installation, the relevant information and proposed grading of this item will be uploaded to the website of the AAB for a one-month public consultation. The AAB will take into account all information and views received during the public consultation before confirming the proposed grading.

(5) and (6) The Development Bureau (DEVB) will look into the options of conserving and revitalising the waterworks installation, after the WSD has completed the temporary strengthening works and tidying up works mentioned above, with a view to enabling the people of Hong Kong to enjoy this place. Before the long term conservation plan is determined, the DEVB will also explore the feasibility of restricted opening for public to visit the place, provided it is safe to do so.

(7) Pursuant to records, the Magazine Gap Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir was constructed in 1901, with a plan area of about 360 square metres (24 meters x 15 meters) and a storage capacity of about 1,800 cubic metres. The peripheral wall and the floor of the service reservoir were constructed of concrete, with the internal face of the wall lined with brickwork. The supporting columns and the arched roof were also constructed of brick. After years of use, the service reservoir had experienced ageing and leakage, and might endanger the stability of the slopes located and buildings under the slopes. As such, the service reservoir had not been in use since 1997.

Subsequently, in order to improve the salt water supply system in Wan Chai, Causeway Bay and Happy Valley and to extend the salt water flushing to Mid-Levels areas for achieving fresh water conservation, the WSD awarded a works contract in 2010 for demolition of the disused Magazine Gap Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir and construction of a new salt water service reservoir at the same site in the same year. The WSD consulted the AMO on the project and the AMO had no objection against the project.

Regarding the old Hatton Road Fresh Water Service Reservoir, it was constructed in 1908 according to records. It had a plan area of about 540 square meters (34 meters x 16 meters) and a storage capacity of about 2,000 cubic metres. The peripheral wall and the floor of the service reservoir were also constructed of concrete, with the internal face of the wall lined with brickwork. The supporting columns and the arched roof were also constructed of brick. After years of use, the service reservoir had experienced ageing and leakage, and might endanger the stability of the adjacent slopes, making it not suitable for long-term use.

To ensure a reliable supply of fresh water to residents of Mid-Levels, the WSD awarded a works contract in 2007 to re-provision and expand the service reservoir in two stages. The first stage of the project was to

construct a new service reservoir with a storage capacity 2,500 cubic meters adjacent to the old service reservoir in 2007. The new service reservoir was commissioned in 2011. The second stage of the project commenced in the same year and involved demolition of the old service reservoir and construction of a new service reservoir at the same site. The total storage capacity of two new service reservoirs was about 7,000 cubic meters.

The WSD consulted the AMO on the project. The AMO noted that the problems could not be solved by maintenance and that the WSD proposed to preserve the brickworks of two columns and the connected arch. The AMO did not object against the project.

(8) and (9) The Government understands the public concerns on the incident. The Permanent Secretary for Development (Works) is leading a working group to review the handing of the case by relevant departments, and to put forward improvement measures to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.

---

## **LCQ16: Conservation of waterworks installations of historic value**

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

Earlier on, some members of the public protested against the demolition of a disused underground cistern at Bishop Hill in Sham Shui Po by the Water Supplies Department (WSD), causing wide public concern about this century-old cistern which is structurally intact and featured with Romanesque style architecture, and the WSD has now halted the demolition works. Regarding conservation of waterworks installations of historic value, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that four stone pillars and part of the upper structure of the cistern have been demolished, whether the authorities have examined the years of existence and origins of such demolished materials; if so, of the details, and whether the same or similar materials can be found for restoration purposes;

(2) whether the preliminary strengthening and tidying up works for the cistern have been completed; if not, when such works will be completed; whether not until the completion of such works will the authorities allow experts to enter the cistern to conduct inspection for assessing its historic value;

(3) given that the Antiquities Advisory Board will give a grading to the cistern in March this year, of the timetable for studying the conservation options and conducting the restoration works;

(4) how the authorities will conduct consultation on the conservation options for the cistern, including the parties to be consulted and the consultation timetable; what channels through which members of the public may express their views;

(5) if the authorities will conduct a study on whether or not other structures at Bishop Hill which are of historic value have to be conserved; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(6) as it has been reported that the authorities are conducting a study on the historic building and heritage value of four service reservoirs which were completed before World War II, whether the study has been completed; if so, of the outcome; whether any parts of the structures concerned have been demolished, thereby making it difficult for them to be restored; if so, of the details;

(7) as the Commissioner for Heritage has indicated that a review has been conducted on the incident in which the staff of the Antiquities and Monuments Office mistook in 2017 this century-old cistern as an ordinary water tank and hence did not take follow up action, of the review outcome, including whether the mistake was attributable to insufficient manpower of conservation experts; if so, of the remedial measures; what measures are in place to regain public confidence in the conservation work of the Government; and

(8) whether the authorities will, by making reference to overseas practices (e.g. the Sydney authorities' conversion of a disused reservoir into Paddington Reservoir Gardens), restore the cistern into a park and undertake to expedite the restoration works, so as to make this public space available for use by members of the public as early as possible; if so, of the additional public facilities to be provided by the authorities in this public space?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of Hon Vincent Cheng's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Water Supplies Department (WSD) commenced the temporary strengthening and tidying up works for the waterworks installation at Bishop Hill at Sham Shui Po on January 5. The works include sorting and protecting the structural elements taken down earlier to facilitate future rehabilitation. The works also comprise local support for part of the concrete roof slabs which may have potential to loosen, brick arches and other elements with potential danger. This is to ensure structural integrity of the installation and to enhance site safety. In addition, in order to prevent flooding, the WSD will also install temporary drainage facilities.

Furthermore, temporary cover on the opening of the roof slab will be provided to prevent the internal structures from exposure to sunlight and other weathering effects. The above temporary strengthening and tidying up works are expected to complete in about three months. According to records, the waterworks installation was built in 1904. To facilitate future rehabilitation and conservation works, the WSD will maintain close communication with the Antiquities and Monuments Office (AMO) while carrying out the above temporary strengthening and tidying up works to ensure the works could maintain the original appearance of the concerned structure as well as allow safe access to staff for carrying out inspection.

(3) and (4) The AMO has also commenced an in-depth research on the heritage value of the waterworks installation, including carrying out the study of this item with reference to the six prevailing assessment criteria (namely historical interest, architectural merit, group value, social value and local interest, authenticity and rarity). The AMO will conduct site inspections, photographic recording and an extensive sourcing and analysis of first-hand information, drawn from local and overseas archives as well as from the WSD. It will also comprehensively review secondary sources such as the relevant researches, journal articles and publications. Upon completion of the in-depth research, the AMO will submit the appraisal to the independent Historic Buildings Assessment Panel (Assessment Panel) for examination and recommendation of a proposed grading for the waterworks installation against the aforesaid six assessment criteria. The AMO is striving submit the appraisal and the Assessment Panel's proposed grading to the Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) for consideration and grading assessment in the first quarter of 2021. When the AAB endorses the proposed grading of the waterworks installation, the relevant information and proposed grading of this item will be uploaded to the website of the the AAB for a one-month public consultation. The AAB will take into account all information and views received during the public consultation before confirming the proposed grading. The Development Bureau will look into the options of conserving and revitalising the waterworks installation, after the WSD has completed the temporary strengthening works and the temporary tidying up works mentioned above, with a view to enabling the people of Hong Kong to enjoy this place.

(5) Besides the above-mentioned waterworks installation at Sham Shui Po, the AMO is examining the conservation of structures with historic values at and in the vicinity of Bishop Hill.

(6) The AMO continues to collaborate with the WSD on a study of underground waterworks installations. According to the currently available information, at least four existing underground installations were built before the War, such as Yau Ma Tei Service Reservoir, Albany Fresh Water Service Reservoir, Mount Gough Fresh Water Service Reservoir and Peak Fresh Water Service Reservoir.

According to the annual report of the Public Works Department in 1894, the construction of Yau Ma Tei Service Reservoir was already completed at that time. However, this service reservoir is believed to have been taken out of service before the War and the WSD does not have relevant as-built drawings and related operation records. This service reservoir still exists

but its condition has yet to be ascertained.

Albany Fresh Water Service Reservoir, Mount Gough Fresh Water Service Reservoir and Peak Fresh Water Service Reservoir are still in normal operation, supplying fresh water to the Mid-Levels Central areas. The basic information of these three service reservoirs is tabled as follows:

Name of Service Reservoir	Plan Area (square metres)	Storage Capacity (cubic metres)	Year of Completion
Albany Fresh Water Service Reservoir	3,496 (76m x 46m)	21,250	1888/1889
Mount Gough Fresh Water Service Reservoir	200 (25m x 8m)	960	1903
Peak Fresh Water Service Reservoir	360 (24m x 15m)	1,800	1897

The study of the above-mentioned four service reservoirs is in progress.

(7) The Government understands the public concerns on the incident. The Permanent Secretary for Development (Works) is leading a working group to review the handing of the case by relevant departments, and to put forward improvement measures to avoid recurrence of similar incidents.

(8) The Government is open in relation to the conservation options. Before the long term conservation plan is determined, the Government will explore the feasibility of restricted opening for public to visit the place, provided it is safe to do so.

---

## [LCQ14: Supply of public 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 (January 20):

Question:

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) publishes the updated public housing construction programme (PHCP) on an annual basis, setting out the volumes of public housing production for the relevant financial year and the ensuing four years. Regarding the supply of public housing, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) since a comparison of the PHCP published in 2020 with the one published in the preceding year shows that the estimated years of completion of the 11 public housing projects listed in Table 1 have been deferred for one year, (i) of the problems resulting in the need to defer the estimated years of completion of such projects, (ii) whether the problems have been solved, and (iii) (if they have not been solved) of the estimated time when the problems can be solved (set out in Table 1);

Table 1

Project	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
Northwest Kowloon Reclamation Site 6 Phase 1			
Pak Tin Phase 7			
Pak Tin Phase 8			
Diamond Hill Phase 1			
Northwest Kowloon Reclamation Site 1 (East)			
Pak Tin Phase 10			
Diamond Hill Phase 2			
Fat Tseung Street West			
Tseung Kwan O Area 65C2 Phase 1			
Queen's Hill Phase 3			
Hang Fu Street, Tuen Mun Area 16			

(2) given that the public housing projects estimated to be completed in the financial year of 2023-2024, as set out in the PHCP published in 2019, included the two projects listed in Table 2, of (i) the reasons for such projects no longer being included in the PHCP published in 2020, and (ii) the years of completion of such projects according to the latest estimate (set out in Table 2);

Table 2

Project	(i)	(ii)
San Kwai Street		
Tai Wo Hau Road Phase 2		

(3) as the Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) indicated in a blog article he published on October 10, 2020 that HA had planned to put up about 4 700 units for sale under the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme in the coming months, of the public housing projects from which those units are drawn and the expected dates on which those units will be open for applications;

(4) given that STH indicated in the aforesaid blog article that an average number of about 26 000 public rental housing (PRH) units (including about 14 000 new units and about 12 000 recovered units) had been allocated to PRH applicants in each of the past five years, but he indicated in his reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on May 13, 2020 that the number of PRH units recovered by HA in each of the past five financial years which could be used for re-allocation ranged from 7 744 to 9 972, of the reasons for the inconsistency in such figures; and

(5) of the specific measures in place to (i) shorten the procedure that need to be gone through for sites that are "not spade-ready" to become "spade-ready" and (ii) minimise the uncertainty of the outcome of such procedure, so as to ensure that public housing projects can be completed as scheduled?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Government's reply to the question raised by the Hon Wilson Or is as follows:

(1) Among the 11 public housing development projects under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) as mentioned in the question, five projects (Northwest Kowloon Reclamation Site 6 Phase 1, Pak Tin Phase 7, Pak Tin Phase 8, Fat Tseung Street West and Tseung Kwan O Area 65C2 Phase 1) can be completed in 2020-21. HA will continue to monitor the progress of the remaining six projects with a view to completing them as soon as possible. Details of the above-mentioned projects are set out in Annex.

Construction works may be affected by various factors, such as inclement weather, progress of works and unforeseeable site constraints, etc. which cause delays. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had also caused impact on the delivery of construction materials and labour supply in 2020 which affected the work progress of certain projects. Although the situation has resumed normal, HA will continue to monitor closely the situation of COVID-19 and liaise closely with the contractors to prioritise work procedures taking into account actual circumstance so as to minimise project delays as far as practicable.

(2) Both San Kwai Street and Tai Wo Hau Road public housing development projects are covered in the draft Kwai Chung Outline Zoning Plan (OZP), which are subject to judicial reviews. As the relevant legal procedures have not yet completed, the OZP cannot be submitted to the Chief Executive in Council for approval. As a result, the Government cannot grant the land concerned to HA for development. According to HA's estimate, these two projects would be completed in 2025-26 or beyond. Therefore, they have not been included in the five-year housing construction programme published in 2020. HA will continue to monitor the progress of these projects with a view to completing them as soon as possible.

(3) According to the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address, around 4 700

flats under the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH) will be put up for sale in phases. The Strategic Planning Committee of HA approved at its meeting on January 11 this year the conversion of the public rental housing (PRH) development at Diamond Hill Comprehensive Development Area Phase 2 at Wong Tai Sin to a GSH project, providing 2 112 flats. Subject to smooth progress of the preparatory work, HA expects to launch the sale of flats of the project in around May this year. Sale of the remaining flats is subject to the sale response of the above-mentioned project.

(4) HA recovers PRH units for re-allocation based on different reasons, including voluntary surrender of units by tenants, tenants having purchased subsidised sale flats, tenants moving out in compliance with the requirements of HA as they breach the tenancy agreements, death of tenants and transfer of tenants to other PRH units, etc. In the past five years, an average of 12 000 units were recovered each year. As for Question 8 of the Legislative Council on May 13, 2020, we provided the number of recovered PRH units for re-allocation excluded units recovered due to transfer as per the question requested.

(5) At present, a number of development processes are involved in transforming a piece of "primitive land" into a "spade-ready site" for building of flats and to the completion of public housing units. These processes include planning and feasibility studies, rezoning, engineering and architectural designs, funding applications, land resumption and clearance, reprovisioning of affected facilities, site formation, as well as infrastructural works and building of flats, etc. In order to expedite the land development process, the DEVB will expand the composition and remit of the Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control established in 2018 to include vetting departments other than those under the DEVB, with a view to reviewing more comprehensively the approval processes of development projects, and rationalising the development-related requirements imposed by different bureaux, such as reviewing whether the technical assessment requirements are clear and suitable. The purpose is to compress development programme and expedite the implementation of public housing projects.

---

## **LCQ19: Anti-epidemic efforts targeted at foreign domestic helpers**

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 20):

Question:

The Government is currently implementing anti-epidemic stipulations such

as prohibiting group gatherings (no-gathering order) and requiring the wearing of a face mask (mask order) in public places. However, during weekends and holidays, there are still quite a number of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) gathering in public places, which increases the risk of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) spreading. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the cumulative number of cases, as at the 19th of this month, in which FDHs were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19;

(2) of the respective up-to-date numbers of FDHs issued with fixed penalty notices (FPNs) by the law enforcement agencies for violating the (i) no-gathering order and (ii) mask order, and set out in the table below by law enforcement agencies (a) the number of FPNs and (b) the type of locations where law enforcement took place (e.g. park and restaurant);

Law enforcement agency	(a)		(b)	
	(i)	(ii)	(i)	(ii)
Hong Kong Police Force				
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department				
Department of Health				
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department				
Leisure and Cultural Services Department				
Home Affairs Department				
Housing Department				
Total:			Park: ...	Park: ...

(3) whether it will consider prohibiting any person from setting up tents in public places during the epidemic, so as to discourage FDHs from gathering and sharing meals in public places during weekends and holidays, thereby reducing the risks of the epidemic spreading; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as the Government provides a one-off free COVID-19 test to all FDHs in Hong Kong from the 18th of last month to the 31st of this month, of the number of eligible FDHs, the number of FDHs who have undergone the tests so far, and whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the initiative; whether it will provide free COVID-19 tests for FDHs on a regular basis and designate FDHs as a targeted group subject to regular compulsory testing; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of the new measures put in place by the Labour Department to provide FDHs and their employers with comprehensive anti-epidemic information and support,

so as to prevent the occurrence of cluster outbreaks among FDHs?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureaux and departments, my consolidated response to the Hon Wong Kwok-kin's question is set out below:

(1) As of January 17, 2021, there were 265 confirmed COVID-19 cases involving foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) who newly arrived in Hong Kong and 245 cases involving those who were already in Hong Kong.

(2) As of January 10, 2021, the statistics on fixed penalty notices issued by relevant departments to FDHs for contravening the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I) are set out at Annex.

(3) The implementation of stringent and decisive social distancing was an effective measure in successfully containing the third wave of the epidemic. The social distancing measures in place at the current stage are similar to the arrangements implemented in response to the peak of the third wave of the epidemic during July and August last year, and are even more stringent in terms of the extent of the measures. In order to implement anti-epidemic measures effectively, it is essential that members of the public strictly comply with the various relevant measures. In this connection, the Government gazetted on December 4, 2020 amendments to Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I. For persons in breach of the requirements on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places under the regulations, the amount for discharging liability for the offence by paying a fixed penalty has been increased from \$2,000 to \$5,000 with effect from December 11, 2020, in order to increase deterrence such that the public would strictly comply with the relevant requirements.

The Labour Department (LD) has all along been conducting mobile broadcasts in Chinese, English and major FDH languages in popular gathering places of FDHs and distributing promotional leaflets to FDHs on Saturdays and Sundays to call upon them to comply with the regulations on mask-wearing and prohibition of group gatherings in public places. During holidays when there would be a relatively large number of FDHs gathering, the LD would collaborate with the relevant departments such as the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Hong Kong Police Force (Police) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to conduct joint operations against behaviour in contravention of social distancing measures and take appropriate enforcement action.

Same as other anti-epidemic work related to public health, solely relying on implementing restrictions through legislation or increasing penalties would not be sufficient for suppressing the epidemic. The Government appeals to the general public to co-operate and be self-disciplined, and to temporarily hold off social activities and avoid

gathering during the crucial anti-epidemic period.

The Government will continue to review the effectiveness of the relevant measures from time to time in view of the development of the pandemic and will make adjustments as appropriate.

When members of the public engage in leisure activities on the amenity lawns in the parks under LCSD's purview, on the premise that it would not affect the operation of the venue and cause danger or obstruction to other venue users, members of the public may, during the daytime opening hours, use some light appliances for shade which are smaller in size and do not need to be specially constructed. However, when members of the public make use of LCSD's parks, they must comply with the requirements under the aforementioned Cap. 599G and Cap. 599I. The LCSD has also taken targeted special measures in its parks, including putting up relevant notices at venue entrances or in conspicuous places, stepping up cleansing work at the venues, as well as deploying more manpower to inspect and give advice, in order to remind users of the relevant requirements and that offenders will be prosecuted.

(4) The Government will continue with the three-pronged strategy of compulsory testing on a mandatory basis, targeted testing on an obligatory basis and testing on a voluntary basis, and implement various testing measures to achieve the objective of "early identification, early isolation and early treatment", with a view to cutting the transmission chains as soon as possible.

For targeted testing on an obligatory basis, the Government continues to arrange testing for various targeted groups based on risk assessment. Regarding FDHs, the Government is providing a free one-off testing service for FDHs in Hong Kong from December 18, 2020 to January 31, 2021. From December 18, 2020 to January 10, 2021, more than 25 000 FDHs received free testing at community testing centres, of which seven samples were found to be positive and had been referred to the Centre for Health Protection for confirmatory tests and follow-up.

The LD arranged in August 2020 a free one-off COVID-19 testing service for all FDHs who were staying in boarding facilities of employment agencies (EAs). In response to confirmed infection cases of FDHs who had stayed in boarding facilities which were not operated by EAs, the Government had expanded the scope of the testing service to cover FDHs whose previous employment contracts have expired or have been terminated and who are waiting to join the new employers' family (this group of FDHs are most likely to be staying in boarding facilities while waiting to change employers). The LD had already provided a total of three rounds of free testing service to such FDHs from August to December 2020. In total, more than 9 000 FDHs benefitted from the aforementioned testing services. The LD would continue to provide free testing service from January to February 2021 for FDHs waiting to join their new employers' family.

The testing figures above show that quite a number of FDHs have received testing voluntarily. Also, it is understood that some employers would arrange FDHs to receive testing at private organisations on their own.

The LD has all along been encouraging FDHs who are staying in boarding facilities while waiting to change employers to actively participate in the free testing to safeguard their health and the health of others. The LD has appealed for EAs' active assistance in arranging these FDHs to undergo testing and strongly advised employers to check that their new FDHs have a valid negative test result before joining the family.

As to the suggestion to mandate FDHs to receive testing regularly, the Government has to carefully consider the justifications for implementing targeted mandatory measures, including objective justifications such as the development of the pandemic, infection cases, risk management, effective use of resources, etc. and to undertake detailed analysis. The Government will closely monitor the situation and examine and implement effective anti-epidemic measures.

(5) To reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in the community, apart from conducting the mobile broadcasts mentioned in part 3 above, the LD has, at the same time, repeatedly provided anti-epidemic information to FDHs and their employers through channels such as press releases, the FDH Portal, FDH groups, employer groups and the Consulates-General of FDH-sending countries in Hong Kong; encouraged FDHs to stay home for rest on their rest day as far as possible and avoid gathering when going out to safeguard their personal health; and appealed to employers and FDHs to have candid discussions on rest day arrangements as well as recommending employers to arrange their FDHs to take rest days on a weekday instead of during the weekend as far as possible, so as to minimise the health risk of participating in social activities.

In addition, the LD approached EA associations multiple times to remind the industry to avoid arranging FDHs to stay in a crowded environment and remind FDHs to comply with personal and environmental hygiene and social distancing guidelines issued by the Centre for Health Protection, including performing hand hygiene frequently, regularly cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces, maintaining an appropriate social distance with other people, etc. In addition, the LD also reminded EAs not to arrange FDHs to gather in boarding facilities and to register the record of FDHs who are staying at or have visited the boarding facilities to facilitate tracing of possible infection cases.