

Stage 2 Public Engagement for the Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas launched (with photo)

The Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Planning Department today (May 22) launched the Stage 2 Public Engagement for the Pilot Study on Underground Space Development in Selected Strategic Urban Areas.

The Study, which commenced in June 2015, aims to explore the potential for underground space development in four selected strategic urban areas (SUAs), namely Tsim Sha Tsui West, Causeway Bay, Happy Valley, and Admiralty/Wan Chai. As revealed by the Stage 1 Public Engagement completed in February 2017, the public generally agreed that the proper utilisation of underground space and provision of an all-weather pedestrian network could alleviate the overcrowded street-level walking environment and improve pedestrian connectivity. It could also provide diverse uses/facilities for the benefit of the community through a holistic planning approach. Among the conceptual schemes of the four SUAs, the Study recommends according priority to taking forward the Kowloon Park Conceptual Scheme in Tsim Sha Tsui West.

The Kowloon Park Conceptual Scheme comprises multi-purpose underground space for accommodating an all-weather and barrier-free underground pedestrian network. Various facilities such as community space, retail/food and beverage and car-parking facilities are also included in the Scheme to address imminent needs and enhance the use of underground space.

In formulating the proposed Kowloon Park Conceptual Scheme, consideration has been made to provide diversified space to enhance accessibility and walkability. The departments will also strive to minimise possible disruptions caused by underground space development to the park, retain Old and Valuable Trees in the park, and preserve built heritage and the Bird Lake. The proposed conceptual scheme will give improve the park area's appearance and re-establish a sustainable green park after the underground space construction.

The Stage 2 Public Engagement of the Study will last for three months to seek public views on the latest recommendations of the Study, including the proposed Kowloon Park Conceptual Scheme. Roving exhibitions, focus group meetings, weekend public events and consultations with key stakeholders will be held during the public engagement period. Virtual reality experiences will be introduced in some of the roving exhibitions to assist the public in understanding the future appearance of the proposed underground space and the rejuvenated Kowloon Park.

The public engagement digest and details of activities are available on the Study website (www.urbanunderground.gov.hk). Members of the public are invited to provide feedback through the following channels on or before August 21, 2019:

Website: www.urbanunderground.gov.hk

E-mail: info_urbanunderground@aecom.com

Fax: 2714 0247

Post: 11/F, Civil Engineering and Development Building,
101 Princess Margaret Road, Homantin, Kowloon
(Please specify "Underground Space Development"
on envelope)



CSSA caseload for April 2019

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in April showed a drop of 608 cases, representing a decrease of 0.3 per cent compared with that of March, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department today (May 22).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of April stood at 223 995 (see attached table), with a total of 318 774 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, low-earnings cases registered a month-to-month decrease of 1.2 per cent to 3 382 cases. Old age cases dropped by 0.4 per cent to 140 664 cases while single parent cases decreased by 0.3 per cent to 24 311 cases. Permanent disability cases slightly slipped by 0.1 per cent to 16 602 cases.

Both ill-health cases and unemployment cases increased by 0.3 per cent

to 23 103 cases and 11 734 cases respectively.

LCQ1: Conservation of the stilt houses at Tai O

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Che-cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

The scale of the stilt houses at Tai O has become very small as a result of natural ageing and repeated damages caused by typhoons, rainstorms and fires, and the stringent control on the refurbishment and reconstruction of the stilt houses under the prevailing squatter control policy and Government Land Licences. Some members of the public have pointed out that the stilt houses are described on the website of the Hong Kong Tourism Board as an iconic feature of the fishermen's village in Tai O and one of the most unique scenic spots in Hong Kong. The Government should therefore regard the stilt houses as cultural heritage and conserve them properly, instead of regulating the stilt houses as squatters. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will turn a blind eye to the disappearance of the stilt houses at Tai O through natural wastage; if not, whether it will formulate a new policy on the control and conservation of the stilt houses; if it will, of the objectives, details and implementation timetable of the new policy;

(2) whether it will change the stipulation that the stilt houses at Tai O may be succeeded to only by immediate family members, so as to facilitate the succession and preservation of the stilt houses; and

(3) whether it will take measures to improve the various systems of the stilt houses at Tai O concerning fire safety, water supply, sewage, electricity supply, public lighting, external access walkways, etc.; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Currently, the stilt houses situated along the waterway of the Tai Oi Creek are mainly structures under Government Land Licences (hereinafter referred to as licensed structures) and surveyed squatter structures covered in the 1982 Squatter Control Survey (hereinafter referred to as surveyed

squatter structures).

I would like to first briefly explain the background of the Government's policies on licensed structures and surveyed squatter structures.

Government Land Licence (GLL) is land instrument issued by the Government in or before the 1970s mainly to regularise unauthorised structures erected on government land in rural areas at the time. Such licensed structures are tolerated on a temporary basis if they comply with the licence requirements, until they have to be cleared for development, environmental improvement or safety reasons, or phased out due to "natural wastage". "Natural wastage" generally refers to the situation where a licensee is deceased and the licence is not succeeded by an immediate family member.

Separately, the Government conducted a territory-wide Squatter Control Survey (SCS) in 1982 to record the locations, dimensions, building materials and uses of the unauthorised structures erected on government land and leased agricultural land at that time. Such records formed the basis for squatter control. If these structures are in accord with the records of the 1982 SCS, generally they are "tolerated" on a temporary basis until they have to be cleared for development, environmental improvement or safety reasons. For surveyed squatter structures, "natural wastage" generally refers to the situation where a structure is no longer occupied and has its squatter survey number cancelled.

Given that these structures were not erected in accordance with the relevant statutes and regulations, they are likely to be less than satisfactory in various aspects including structural, density, fire safety specifications, ventilation and hygiene standards. The purpose of the aforesaid policies on licensed structures and surveyed squatter structures is to freeze and gradually reduce the number of unauthorised structures in the society.

Having consulted the relevant departments, my reply to the three-part question is as follows:

(1) As far as stilt houses in Tai O are concerned, cases of cancellation of relevant GLL or squatter survey number due to "natural wastage" have not happened in the past two years.

The aforesaid policies on licensed structures and surveyed squatter structures are applicable to the entire Hong Kong. As regards conservation of stilt houses in Tai O, we believe the recently proposed \$1 billion Lantau Conservation Fund may bring about a new opportunity to the community. In view of the traits of Tai O stilt houses, the Government plans to explore in future whether the proposed Lantau Conservation Fund can be tapped to enable stilt houses returned to the Government to be used for purposes benefiting the community instead of being demolished. For instance, subject to local situation and views, those stilt structures which originally will be demolished may be handed to non-governmental organisations for revitalisation and management through an appropriate mechanism to facilitate culture

conservation and community support. The Government is considering such possibility.

As for licensed structures or surveyed squatter structures that are still being occupied, the licensees or occupants may apply for rebuilding or repairing the licensed structures or surveyed squatter structures concerned in accordance with the relevant policies. The Government will consider the applications in a reasonable manner.

(2) Under the prevailing policies, if the licensee of a GLL passes away, generally only an immediate family member of his or her may apply for succession of the GLL. For surveyed squatter structures, the Government does not control the identity of the occupants. Such structures may be "tolerated" on a temporary basis if they accord with the 1982 SCS record.

In respect of transfer, conditions of licensed structures stipulate that GLLs are not transferable, whereas surveyed squatter structures has no legal interest in land at all. As the purpose of the policies is to gradually reduce and prevent persistence of unauthorised structures which do not comply with relevant requirement and safety standards in the society, the Government does not plan to change the existing arrangement. If the Government were to permit lawful transfer of such structures, there would be far-reaching implications on the society.

(3) Government departments have been pressing ahead with various improvement works for the Tai O area and its stilt houses. On fire services, currently the two fire stations in Tai O have already made special firefighting arrangements to cater for the village paths and stilt houses in Tai O, and especially installed a number of "firefighting toolboxes" along the walkways near the stilt houses in Tai O. The Fire Services Department also regularly arranges fire safety talks and fire drills for local residents.

On water supply, the stilt houses in Tai O are provided with adequate potable water supply. The Water Services Department also plans to assist the stilt house residents in replacing the pipelines along the public walkways to enhance reliability of water supply in the area.

On sewerage, the Government has already drawn up a plan to improve Tai O's underground public sewerage network. The Government will extend the public sewer to the government land nearest to the stilt house areas and reserve space for terminal manholes to facilitate residents' sewer connection.

On electricity supply, CLP Power Hong Kong Limited regularly inspects the electricity supply facilities in the area and will also maintain contact with the residents to ensure stability and safety of electricity supply.

The Highways Department and the Lands Department have been undertaking repairs and maintenance for public lighting systems in the area. The Islands District Office also plans to install lights at public walkways in some stilt house areas in the second half of this year.

The Civil Engineering and Development Department is currently implementing the improvement works at Tai O in phases. Phase 1 of the project was completed in March 2013, comprising mainly the construction of a riverwall at Yat Chung and the associated drainage and sewerage improvement works to alleviate risk of flooding. Phase 2 Stage 1 of the project is currently under way, and the detailed design of Phase 2 Stage 2, which involves construction of two footbridges, will soon be carried out.

President, the relevant government departments would continue to review from time to time Tai O residents' needs for various kinds of social services, and make appropriate arrangements and improvements having regard to the needs of the area. Thank you, President.

LCQ6: Care services for children

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question :

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) implements the foster care service to provide residential family care for children in need under 18 years of age, and provides children under nine years of age with day care services through the home-based child carers under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project. Regarding these two types of care services for children, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on foster care service in each of the past three years: the respective numbers of foster families, foster children and children waiting to be placed, as well as the respective average time for which the children waited to be placed and stayed with the foster family; the number of home-based child carers and the number of children they took care of in each of the past three years;

(2) as it is learnt that SWD has encountered difficulties in recruiting foster families and home-based child carers, whether the Government will raise the allowance and incentive payment for foster parents, as well as the incentive payment for home-based child carers; whether SWD will set target numbers of these two types of carers to be recruited; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures put in place to enhance public recognition for the contributions made by these two types of carers; whether it will formulate new measures for stepping up its support for these two types of carers; if

so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply :

President,

My reply to the Hon Alice Mak's question is as follows:

(1) Foster care service provides residential family care for children aged under 18 who cannot be adequately taken care of by their families due to family problems or crises, so that they may continue to enjoy family life before they re-unite with their families, join an adoptive family or live independently; and foster care (emergency) service provides immediate and short-term residential family care to children whose parents cannot care for them because of emergency or crisis situations. In the past three years, the number of foster homes, the number of children in placement, the average number of children on waiting list, average waiting time and duration of stay with foster families are at Annex 1.

The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) aims to provide a flexible form of child care service for children aged under nine at the neighbourhood level and, at the same time, to foster mutual help and care in the community. In the past three years, the number of home-based child carers and the number of children served are at Annex 2.

(2) In order to further support families in need and recruit more families to provide foster care service, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has raised various foster care allowances by more than 20 per cent since December 2017. The SWD has also introduced a new grant of extra incentive payment for taking care of children under the age of three, so as to encourage foster families to take care of young children. As for the NSCCP, home-based child carers provide child care service as volunteers in the spirit of care for others and will receive incentive payment for recognition of their contribution to the service. The SWD will raise the level of incentive payment to child carers in 2019-20 to show appreciation and encouragement to the home-based child carers for their service. The SWD will discuss with the service operators details of the arrangement later.

As regards the recruitment of foster families, in order to let more general public learn about foster care service and recruit more suitable foster families, the SWD launched a set of television/radio Announcement in the Public Interest and posters in respect of foster care service in April 2017, so as to strengthen the promotion of foster care service. The SWD will continue to collaborate with the 11 foster care agencies to promote and recruit foster families through various channels and the media. Apart from encouraging more families with selflessness, love and enthusiasm to provide foster care service, the SWD also welcomes those who can commit themselves to join in the force of foster parents for being short term or substitute carers in taking care of foster children, so as to provide services to more children in need. As for the NSCCP, since its implementation, service operators have been recruiting suitable volunteers to serve as home-based child carers.

Also, the SWD has been producing promotional materials for NSCCP and promoting it to the public and social service units through different channels including seminars and meetings.

(3) The SWD organises the Foster Families Service Award Presentation Ceremony on a biennial basis to recognise and commend foster parents' commitment to foster care service and let foster parents exchange and share their experience, while promoting foster care service through the media. As for the NSCCP, in addition to the incentive payment for home-based child carers, individual service operators will also hold volunteer recognition ceremony on a regular basis to recognise their contribution to the service and to encourage more volunteers to join as child carers and continue promoting mutual help and care in the neighbourhood and at the same time meeting the need of child care services.

In addition, to provide support for foster parents, the SWD in collaboration with the foster care agencies organise relevant training programmes for them, including pre-service training for prospective foster parents and training on care of foster children. It also provides assistance to foster parents in learning about the characteristics and development needs of children with special needs, as well as the caring skills required and how to communicate with the birth parents. When the foster parents encounter difficulties in caring for foster children, the responsible supervising foster care workers will provide them with timely assistance and support.

As regards the NSCCP, the SWD will further enhance the service quality in 2019-20, including additional provisions for service operators to increase professional and supporting staff under NSCCP so as to strengthen training for home-based child carers.

DoJ publishes guide to judicial review proceedings: "The Judge Over Your Shoulder"

A spokesman for the Department of Justice (DoJ) today (May 22) announced the publication of the latest edition of "The Judge Over Your Shoulder – A Guide to Judicial Review for Administrators" (JOYS) at the DoJ's website (www.doj.gov.hk/eng/public/The_Judge_Over_Your_Shoulder.html).

"Since it was first published in 2010, JOYS has served to provide guidance to administrators in the Government on principles of judicial review which are relevant to their work as decision or policy makers. The purpose of the publication is to provide a better understanding of judicial review so as to maintain the highest standards of public administration in Hong Kong," the

spokesman said.

"The latest edition of JOYS is now available on the DoJ's website in English and Chinese versions. We hope that the guide, by providing an overview of the relevant law, will serve as a useful general reference for not only government officials, but anyone who wishes to understand more about judicial review, which is an integral part of the Hong Kong legal system," the spokesman continued.