LCQ8: Opening up data of Government, public organisations and public utilities

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

The Chief Executive has mentioned in this year's Policy Address that the Government has firmed up the policy and measures on opening up government data, including the establishment of a mechanism that requires all government departments to publish annually their open data plans for the coming year, and the first of such plans are to be published by the end of this year. There are comments that public organisations and public utilities should also open up their data to promote the development of Hong Kong into a smart city. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the government department or committee responsible for executing the aforesaid mechanism as well as the vetting and approval of the open data plans submitted by the various departments; the number of government datasets expected to be opened up next year;

(2) whether the first open data plans to be published by the various government departments will contain implementation timetables; if so, of the details;

(3) whether the various government departments will open up more real-time data which are related to people's livelihood (e.g. data on the utilisation rates of public swimming pool complexes and study rooms);

(4) whether it will request public organisations such as the Hospital Authority and the Town Planning Board to formulate open data plans; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it has formulated strategies and work plans for encouraging public utilities to open up their data, including (i) reviewing the relevant legal framework and (ii) considering the addition of provisions on opening up of data to the franchise agreements to be signed in future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the relevant bureaux and departments, our reply to the five parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In September 2018, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) issued guidelines to all government bureaux and departments (B/Ds) on the new open data policy and implementation measures. B/Ds are required to progressively open up their data for free use by the public under the "data.gov.hk" portal, and formulate and publish their annual open data plans on their websites every year. Their first annual open data plans should be published by the end of 2018. In addition, relevant B/Ds should explore feasible options to encourage public and private organisations to open up their data related to public facilities or with high degree of public interest, and include specific measures in this regard in their annual open data plans. The OGCIO will play a co-ordinating role to collect the annual open data plans of B/Ds, and provide a full list under the "data.gov.hk" portal for soliciting views and suggestions from the public.

Since B/Ds are currently preparing the relevant plans, at this stage we are unable to provide the number of additional datasets to be released next year.

(2) In formulating their annual open data plans, B/Ds will take into account the needs of the public and the industry in assessing the priority and the timetable of opening up different data.

(3) The data currently opened up or planned to be opened up shortly by B/Ds cover different areas, including medical and health, transport, education, commerce and economy, environment, leisure and culture, housing, land development and information relating to people's livelihood.

Currently, public libraries under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) do not have a system to collect and disseminate real-time facility utilisation data. In developing the new library system, the LCSD will actively study measures to open up more real-time data about the utilisation of library facilities, for example the usage and booking of computer workstations. As for public swimming pools, some of them display the attendance at the entrances. However, the information technology system is not equipped with a real-time attendance data transmission function, and therefore LCSD is not able to further open up such information.

(4) At present, open data collected and compiled by some public organisations (e.g. the Insurance Authority, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hospital Authority (HA)) are already available on the "data.gov.hk" portal.

Data from the HA will form part of the Food and Health Bureau's annual open data plan. Currently, datasets from the HA which have been uploaded to the "data.gov.hk" portal include inpatient and day inpatient services throughputs, statistics on cancer, information of hospitals and clinics, etc. The HA will update the uploaded datasets regularly and will consider making available new types of data, such as waiting time for Accident & Emergency Departments and Specialist Out-patient Clinics.

The Town Planning Board (TPB) has already published information on planning applications, amendments to statutory plans, etc. via TPB's website for public inspection. The TPB is also preparing for releasing relevant information via the "data.gov.hk" portal starting from 2019.

(5) At present, the "data.gov.hk" portal has made available information related to public utilities, including:

(i) MTR stations and services as published by MTR Corporation Limited;
(ii) tramways main routes and tram stops as published by Hong Kong Tramways Limited;
(iii) location of electric vehicle charging stations as published by CLP Power Hong Kong Limited; and
(iv) location of electric vehicle charging stations, estimated power consumption for general office appliances, and defect rectification tips for customers' electrical installations as published by The Hongkong Electric Company Limited.

The "data.gov.hk" portal has provided information on timetables and fare tables of the franchised ferry services operated by The "Star" Ferry Company, Limited since September this year.

Moreover, the Government proposes in the 2018 Policy Address to fund and develop a data collection system and a mobile application, as well as install global positioning devices on green minibuses (GMB), so as to enable passengers to get access to the real-time arrival information of GMB routes through the Transport Department (TD)'s website and "HKeMobility" mobile application. The relevant data will also be released in machine-readable format via the "data.gov.hk" portal for free use by the public. It is expected that the system will be launched officially in early 2022.

On franchised buses, all franchised bus companies currently provide passengers with real-time bus arrival information on their regular bus routes through their websites and smartphone applications. They also work with the TD in providing the real-time arrival information in the TD's "HKeMobility" mobile application and website. The six bus franchises will only expire in 2023 or later. When the bus franchises are about to expire, the Government will continue to deal with the renewal applications in accordance with the relevant legislation and the established procedures, including consideration of adding clauses to the franchise to enhance services. The Government will continue to discuss with the public transport operators, and actively encourage and facilitate the opening up of their data in machine-readable format on the "data.gov.hk" portal, in the light of the Government’s open data policy.

Besides, the two power companies are planning to provide more power consumption data, having regard to relevant factors including safeguards for customers' privacy and compliance with relevant legislation.

LCQ16: Leave deduction arrangements for civil servants working under the six-day work week mode

Following is a question by Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

A civil servants' trade union has relayed to me that under the existing requirement, when staff members take leave for one week, those who work under the six-day work week mode will have six days deducted from their annual leave balance, whereas their counterparts who work under the five-day work week mode will have five days deducted. In March last year, the union proposed that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) implement, for staff of the various grades in the Department working under the six-day work week mode, the following trial scheme: staff members who are absent from work for seven days in a duty cycle will be subject to annual leave deduction of five days instead of six days. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the reasons why LCSD has not yet implemented the trial scheme after considering it for more than one year;

(2) whether it has studied the feasibility of the trial scheme; if so, of the study outcome (including the implementation difficulties, and the workload implications on staff);

(3) whether LCSD will implement the trial scheme first for the Amenities Assistant grade staff for a period of one year, and extend the scheme, after it has been proved to work, to cover other grades; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) as some trade unions have relayed that the Civil Service Bureau has set out a number of pre-conditions for LCSD to implement the trial scheme, of the relevant details; and

(5) as the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) (i) introduced in December 2015 a similar trial scheme, (ii) has since January this year been testing the implications of the relevant leave deduction arrangement on the department, and (iii) is updating its e-leave system for implementing the said arrangement, whether LCSD has assessed if its e-leave system can dovetail with the implementation of the trial scheme; if it has assessed and the outcome is in the negative, of the details and whether it has any solution; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

As regards the various parts of the question, after consulting the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), my reply is as follows –

(1), (2) and (4) The LCSD understands the concern of officers working on a non-five day week work pattern on their Leave Deduction Arrangements (LDA). CSB earlier invited all departments that had not fully implemented five-day week (including the LCSD) to explore the feasibility of revising the LDA for staff on non-five day work week pattern, but all LDA proposals should comply with the related basic principles, i.e. (a) no reduction in the conditioned hours of service of individual staff; (b) no additional manpower and no reduction in the level of service to public; and (c) existing rules governing leave remain intact.

The LCSD has conducted initial review on the operation of service units/venues under its purview. Given that the department manages a variety and large number of venues, and different venues have staff of different grades, with varying establishment, conditioned hours of work, job nature and shift patterns, the LCSD needs more time to devise a pilot scheme that complies with the relevant basic principles. Careful consideration has also to be given to various aspects in order not to affect public service. The LCSD has yet to formulate a feasible pilot scheme of revised LDA for officers on non-five day week work pattern. Besides, the Electronic Leave Application and Processing System (ELAPS) currently used by the department cannot process revised LDA. It is envisaged that manual processing and calculation of such "leave deduction" will involve additional workload and may lead to problems on leave record management. The LCSD considers it necessary to duly address the issues mentioned above before proposing any pilot scheme.

(3) The LCSD understands the concerns of individual grades/staff unions on the progress of the revised LDA but the feasibility of implementing a pilot scheme of revised LDA is subject to consideration in multiple perspectives. The department will continue examining the feasibility of implementing a pilot scheme of revised LDA and relevant issues. A concrete trial plan and its timetable are not available at this stage.

(5) As mentioned in the reply to part (1) of the question, the ELAPS currently used by the department cannot process revised LDA. The LCSD will continue examining the feasibility of implementing a pilot scheme of revised LDA and other relevant issues. At this stage, there is no plan to update the ELAPS or develop a new system to cater for revised LDA.

LCQ22: HOS flats for purchase by White Form applicants

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

It has been reported that an overwhelming response has been received for each sale exercise for Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats since the sale was resumed in 2014 by the authorities. At present, the ratio of the quota of HOS flats allocated to White Form (WF) applicants to the quota for Green Form (GF) applicants is 50:50. However, the number of WF applicants is many times higher than that of GF applicants. Some WF applicants who have applied for purchasing HOS flats for several times but in vain feel discouraged. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the authorities decided in January this year to regularise the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme, those eligible for GF status will have a greater chance of acquiring homes than before, whether the authorities will, in future, consider raising the ratio of HOS flats allocated to WF applicants; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the authorities have kept information on the numbers of previous attempts made by applicants for purchasing HOS flats; if so, of the highest number of unsuccessful attempts made by an individual applicant so far; if not, whether the authorities will consider keeping such information; and

(3) whether the authorities will consider, when putting up HOS flats for sale in future, increasing the chance of success in a ballot for those WF applicants who have been unsuccessful consecutively for a number of times; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to consummate the housing ladder by providing subsidised sale flats, including Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) flats, to help low to middle-income families to achieve home ownership. My reply to Hon Wu Chi-wai's questions is as follows:

(1) In line with established practice, prior to the launching of each HOS sale exercise, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) will draw up the sales arrangements, including the quota between Green Form (GF) and White Form (WF) applicants, having regard to prevailing circumstances.

The quota between GF and WF applicants has varied over the years, with the GF portion ranging from 50 per cent to 80 per cent. HA resumed sale of HOS flats in 2014. The quota between GF and WF applicants was 60:40 for Sale of HOS Flats 2014, and changed to 50:50 for Sale of HOS Flats 2016 to Sale of HOS Flats 2018. Any remaining quota from the GF will be re-allocated to the WF queue, and vice versa.

In determining the quota allocation between GF and WF applicants for Sale of HOS Flats 2018, HA has taken into account the Subsidised Housing Committee (SHC)'s decision to regularise the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH). The next GSH project will be launched in end-2018, providing more home ownership opportunities for GF applicants. SHC has also endorsed the launching of the White Form Secondary market Scheme (WSM) regularly. The 2018 WSM, with a quota of 2 500, provides WF buyers an additional avenue for home ownership. Balancing the home ownership aspirations between GF and WF buyers, the quota allocation between GF and WF applicants was maintained at 50:50.

The HA will continue to consider all relevant factors when determining the quota allocation between GF and WF applicants in future.

(2) The HA does not have records on the number of previous attempts made by applicants in purchasing HOS flats. The survey findings for Sale of HOS Flats 2016 conducted last year contain information on whether successful buyers had applied for the Sale of HOS Flats 2014. The relevant information has been uploaded onto HA's webpage, and is extracted at Annex for Members' reference.

The Housing Department will review the information kept/compiled as and when necessary.

(3) As mentioned above, prior to launching each HOS sale exercise, the HA will formulate the relevant arrangements, including the applicants' order of priority for flat selection. Since the resumption of HOS in 2014, the HA accorded priority to certain categories of applicants, including applicants affected by the Government's clearance programme(s), applicants with elderly members and family applicants.

In determining the priority of flat selection for different categories of applicants, HA has to consider how to allocate limited resources to those with most pressing needs. Since the number of HOS flats put up for sale under each exercise is fixed, giving priority to certain categories of applicants means a lower priority for other categories.

LCQ14: Impact of damage to sewage

treatment facilities and the resilience of the facilities against typhoons

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

It has been reported that as some of its pipes and secondary treatment facilities were damaged during the time when super typhoon Mangkhut hit Hong Kong in September this year, the Sai Kung Sewage Treatment Works has since then been discharging into the sea effluent which was primary treated only. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the details (including timetable, progress and expenditure incurred) of the inspections and repair works carried out by the authorities in respect of the damaged facilities of the aforesaid plant;

(2) whether it has assessed the impact on the quality of the water bodies in the areas in Sai Kung brought about by the plant’s discharge of effluent which has not been fully treated; if so, of the outcome; given that the effluent treated by the plant will be discharged into the Port Shelter via a submarine outfall, of the current compliance rates of the water bodies there on the key marine Water Quality Objectives parameters (total inorganic nitrogen, unionized ammonia and E. coli, etc.);

(3) whether it has assessed if the interim measures taken by the authorities during the period when the facilities concerned remained damaged can effectively alleviate the impact on the water quality brought about by the plant's discharge of effluent which has not been fully treated; and

(4) whether it will comprehensively review the resilience of various sewage treatment facilities against strong wind and storm surges, and implement the necessary strengthening measures; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Kenneth Leung is as follows:

(1) After super typhoon Mangkhut hit Hong Kong in September this year, under safe conditions, staff of the Drainage Services Department (DSD) immediately inspected the damage caused to various sewage treatment facilities on

September 17 and found that over 50 metres of seawall and many treatment units of the Sai Kung Sewage Treatment Works (SKSTW) were severely damaged. These included the ultraviolet (UV) disinfection system, equipment for secondary sewage treatment such as air blowers, electrical installations and sludge pumps and some pipework. As a result, only primary treatment could be maintained at that time, with partially treated effluent discharged nearshore. The DSD immediately activated a contingency plan to remove some of the boulders and debris and pump out the seawater in order to assess the damage of the mechanical facilities and arrange emergency repair. To reduce the impact to the environment, the DSD has immediately implemented an additional procedure to disinfect the effluent that was treated to primary level. On September 24, the DSD completed the restoration of some major pipework and diverted the partially treated effluent back to the original submarine outfall for dispersed discharge at a location some 400 meters from SKSTW in Port Shelter. On October 12, the DSD installed some temporary facilities to further upgrade the treatment capability to chemically enhanced primary treatment (CEPT) (Note). Initial restoration works for the damaged seawall was completed on October 3 with the assistance of the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD). At present, the DSD is expediting the installation temporary facilities such as power distribution units, blowers, auxiliary pipes, sludge pumps and UV disinfection systems, with a view to resuming secondary level sewage treatment by December. However, the full repair of all treatment facilities may take some more months.

The DSD’s preliminary cost estimate of the above emergency repair and temporary facilities is about $25 million. However, the full cost of all the repair and modification works is yet to be evaluated.

(2) and (3) In respect of the incident, the DSD and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) commenced seawater sampling and testing near SKSTW and at three nearby beaches (i.e. Kiu Tsui Beach, Trio Beach, and Hap Mun Bay Beach) on September 21 for close monitoring of the water quality and started to release the results on the DSD's website on September 24. The monitoring results showed that there has been no obvious sign of deterioration of water quality near SKSTW, and the effect of the incident on the three beaches has also been minimal, with the E.coli level of water samples largely remained within the normal ranges of fluctuation. As regards the water quality of the Port Shelter Water Control Zone, the monitoring data up to October 2018 (including those obtained after the incident at SKSTW) shows that the levels of E. coli, dissolved oxygen, total inorganic nitrogen and non-ionised ammonia nitrogen have fully (100 per cent) met the Water Quality Objectives. Therefore, the EPD considers that the emergency measures adopted by the DSD have been effective in mitigating the potential impact to water quality due to the typhoon damage of SKSTW.

(4) In order to strengthen the resilience of the seawall against extreme waves, the CEDD has taken into account the impact of climate change in the design of seawall strengthening works in accordance with the latest requirements of the Port Works Design Manual – Corrigendum No.1/2018 and adopted the most critical loading condition (i.e. 100 years extreme wave plus

10 years extreme water level). In addition, in order to counteract the long-term effect of climate change, the DSD commenced the "Climate Change Impact Study on Sewerage Facilities in Hong Kong" in 2015. The study will assess the impact of climate change on sewerage facilities in Hong Kong; and develop corresponding mitigation and adaptation measures for the planning, design, construction and maintenance of sewerage facilities and a framework plan for the continual monitoring and mitigation of climate change impact to Hong Kong's sewerage facilities. The study is expected to complete in 2019.

Note: About 75 per cent of the sewage in Hong Kong is currently treated by CEPT process.

LCQ4: Promotion of green finance

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau, in the Legislative Council today (November 7):

Question:

It is learnt that there were 16 cases of local green bond issuance in the first half of this year, raising funds of US$6.8 billion in total, which was three times the amount for the whole of last year. Some analyses have pointed out that the green industries on the Mainland will have a capital demand of about RMB3 trillion to RMB4 trillion per year during the period covered by the country's 13th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development, and the infrastructure projects in the countries along the Belt and Road will have a capital demand of US$1.5 trillion per year between 2016 and 2030, as estimated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Such situations have presented opportunities for Hong Kong to develop green finance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that there is a need for the Government to set up a green financial system framework comprising clear green standards, specific development guidelines and comprehensive regulations, and at present some 20 countries and regions across the globe have rolled out a green finance development roadmap, whether the Government has considered developing (i) a green financial system framework, and (ii) a green finance development roadmap; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as some analyses have pointed out that private capital participation is crucial to the development of green finance, whether the Government has considered, by making reference to the approach of the United Kingdom (UK), financing the establishment of an independent green investment bank to mobilise private capital to invest in green projects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has considered, by making reference to the experience of countries such as the UK and Germany, boosting the development of green finance through fiscal policies, such as introducing tax concessions, offering profit tax exemption to funds investing in green finance products, as well as granting interest subsidies to green lending products; if so, of the details; if not, the reason for that?

Reply:

President,

Our replies to the three parts of the question are as follow:

(1) and (3) Green finance is a new but rapidly expanding area of financial activities that seeks to bring a positive impact on the environment through emphasis on social responsibility and sustainable development. Riding on the increasing global demand for green financial products, Hong Kong, as an international financial centre and the global Renminbi business hub, is well-equipped to develop green finance, in particular serving as a premier financing platform for international and Mainland green enterprises/projects in raising funds through issuing bonds and initial public offerings.

The Government is making progress on various fronts to develop and firmly establish Hong Kong as a leading hub for green finance in the region, with focus on the Mainland of China and economies along the Belt and Road. The Government would facilitate and provide the necessary infrastructure and catalyst for jump-starting market developments. We will at the same time build up our international profile on green finance with increased international visibility and proactive promotion targeting audience overseas.

On promoting local certification for green finance products, the Hong Kong Quality Assurance Agency (HKQAA) established a Green Finance Certification Scheme (GFCS) early this year to provide third-party conformity assessments for issuers on their green financial instruments by making reference to a number of international and national standards. Representatives of the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Environment Bureau attended meetings of the HKQAA's Technical Committee as observers upon their deliberation on the technical details of GFCS. We will continue to support GFCS's implementation and encourage local, Mainland and overseas enterprises to make use of the Scheme and our capital markets for financing their green projects.

Many local, Mainland and international organisations, such as the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, have made use of Hong Kong to issue green bonds. This attests to the strengths of our competitive capital markets. To attract more green bond issuance and promote market development in Hong Kong, the Government has launched the Green Bond Grant Scheme to subsidise eligible green bond issuers in obtaining certification under the GFCS, as well as the Pilot Bond Grant Scheme to provide grant to eligible enterprises issuing bonds (including green bonds) in Hong Kong for the first time. We have also enhanced the Qualifying Debt Instrument Scheme to provide tax concession for bond investment in Hong Kong.

We hope that the Legislative Council would authorise the Government to implement the Government Green Bond Programme as soon as possible by making the proposed resolution under the Loans Ordinance to facilitate the inaugural government green bond issuance, with a view to setting a good example for the green finance market in Hong Kong and attracting more local, Mainland and international investors and financiers to participate therein. Moreover, we are reviewing the tax arrangements applicable to funds and we plan to introduce a legislation by the end of the year, so that different types of both onshore and offshore funds operated in Hong Kong, subject to certain eligibility requirements, can enjoy profits tax exemption for transactions in qualifying assets including securities, futures and shares of private companies, etc. This tax arrangement would be applicable for funds investing in green finance products which can be classified as such qualifying assets.

We would strengthen efforts to publicise Hong Kong's competitive capital markets, highlight our edge in developing green financial products and raise green finance awareness at regional and international forums including the Asian Financial Forum organised in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority hosted the International Capital Markets Association's Green and Social Bond Principles Annual General Meeting and Conference and a seminar with the People's Bank of China on Mainland-Hong Kong green finance opportunities this June, which altogether attracted some 1 300 market participants.

Furthermore, the Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing Limited (HKEX) became a Partner of the United Nations Sustainable Stock Exchange Initiative this June, committing to further promotion of sustainable and transparent capital markets. The Securities and Futures Commission published its Strategic Framework for Green Finance this September and looks forward to fostering cross-agency and public-private collaboration to develop green finance, on which it has started discussions with the HKEX, other financial authorities, key stakeholders along the investment chain and the wider financial community.

(2) Most of the large-scale green infrastructure projects in Hong Kong, such as sewage treatment, waste management and district cooling systems, etc., are carried out by the Government. Investors who are interested in financing green projects of the Government can participate in our Government Green Bond Programme. In addition, private organisations can make use of our capital markets to issue green financial instruments. Thus, the market effect of and actual demand for a green investment bank in Hong Kong are limited at the moment.

Moreover, the Government has various initiatives in place to support local environmental and recycling industries and attract private capital to invest in different green projects. For instance, the $1 billion Recycling Fund was launched in October 2015 to provide funding support for the local recycling industry in general or in specific sectors in enhancing their operational standards and productivity. On promoting the development of renewable energy (RE), the Government and the two power companies have introduced Feed-in Tariff Scheme under the post-2018 Scheme of Control Agreements to provide economic incentives for individuals and non-government bodies to invest in RE.