

# LCQ12: Sealing up corridor-facing louvres of public rental housing flats

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

It has been reported that in recent months, the Housing Department (HD) has posted notices in some public rental housing (PRH) estates, stating that the HD must undertake fire safety improvement works pursuant to the requirements of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572), including sealing up all domestic flat louvres facing common exit corridors with fire-resisting boards in phases starting from next year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the numbers of PRH estates and domestic flats involved in the aforesaid works, as well as the implementation schedules;
- (2) as some PRH tenants are worried that their flats will become poorly-lit due to the lack of lighting penetration from the corridors after the relevant works, whether the HD has studied the alternative options, including allocating resources to seal up the louvres with fire-resisting glasses instead of fire-resisting boards, so as to retain the effect of light penetration; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will assist PRH tenants who have modified their louvres on their own to remove externally-attached objects and carry out reinstatement works, with a waiver of the relevant expenses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) whether it will step up publicity and explanation efforts, so that the affected PRH tenants can gain an understanding of the procedures and implementation progress of the relevant works; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Buildings Department (BD) and Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is set out below:

According to the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572) (the Ordinance), composite and domestic buildings constructed on or before March 1, 1987, or with the plans of the buildings works first submitted to the

Building Authority for approval on or before that day (the target buildings) are required to upgrade the fire safety standards to meet modern fire protection requirements. Currently, under the Housing Authority, there are 477 public rental housing (PRH) blocks in 64 estates regulated by the Ordinance.

Since the Ordinance came into effect on July 1, 2007, the Housing Department (HD) has been in close liaison with the BD and FSD to formulate feasible fire safety improvement proposals and implementation details for the target buildings, including conducting assessments of the target buildings; appointing fire engineering consultants to study the works details; as well as liaising with the BD and FSD on the vetting and acceptance processes, etc. The HD has been implementing the improvement works taking into account the difficulty and priority of the projects and basing on the acceptance progress of improvement proposals, scope of works, and co-ordination with other maintenance programmes of the target buildings concerned. In fact, shortly after the Ordinance took effect, some improvement works which are comparatively easy to implement, such as replacement of fire doors and installation of emergency lighting systems, have commenced by phase. Considering the large number of target buildings with varying architectural layout and designs, the HD, BD and FSD have been in close liaison in conducting joint inspections to each target building by phase to determine the required scope of fire safety improvement works for each building. The HD also submitted fire safety improvement proposals based on the requirements and subsequently arranged the necessary improvement works at once upon receipt of the acceptance from the BD and FSD.

With regard to the louver enclosure works at the older PRH blocks, the fire engineering consultant pointed out that the domestic flats concerned are with louvers facing the internal corridor, which is not separated from the escape staircases. Therefore, in the event of fire accidents, the louvers of these flats could not resist fire and smoke, leading to proliferation of fire and smoke through the louvers to the internal corridor or other flats. Notwithstanding that some tenants had adopted different materials and methods to enclose the louvers on their own in the past years for privacy, sound insulation or security concerns, these materials or methods might not render effective fire resistance. The HD is aware that tenants may have different views on the louver enclosure works. Therefore, upon confirmation of the necessity of the enclosure works to enhance fire protection in 2018, the HD requested fire engineering consultants to conduct an in-depth investigation to explore the feasibility of using various materials or methods to formulate the most suitable approach.

Our reply to various parts of the question is as follows:

- (1) The enclosure works involved around 240 PRH blocks in 53 estates of around 136 000 domestic flats. The HD first commenced the enclosure works in Fu Shan Estate in late October 2024, and the enclosure works will be progressively arranged in other estates concerned.
- (2) After a thorough study on the feasibility and safety of the enclosure

works, upon on-site inspections and multiple discussions with the BD and FSD, the HD has decided to enclose the louver windows facing internal corridors with fire-resisting boards to enhance fire protection. In selection of enclosure materials, the HD has taken into account a wide range of criteria including the impact on the width of internal corridor as the means of escape, the specifications, supply of materials, cost, fire resistance, installation procedures, future maintenance, impact on tenants, etc. In fact, sufficient natural lighting and ventilation has been provided for all relevant domestic flats through balconies and windows.

(3) The HD has deliberated on the specification details and work procedures of the enclosure works. Generally, works could be carried out outside domestic flats. Tenants are not required to attend or bear any cost. If tenants have enclosed the louvers on their own, no reinstatement by tenants is required. The HD will provide necessary assistance to residents for removal of their belongings hung on louvers.

(4) In order to familiarise tenants with the arrangement details of the louver enclosure works, before the commencement of works in Fu Shan Estate, the HD posted notices and photos at the lift lobby on the ground floor and at the lobby on all floors in the PRH blocks concerned, displayed the mock-up of the enclosed louver in the estates, issued letters to affected households, and briefly introduced the progress of the works in Estate Newsletter. During the period of late September to early October 2024, the HD met with a number of Wong Tai Sin District Council members respectively to introduce and answer the enquiries about the relevant fire safety improvement works. In early October 2024, the HD also convened a briefing session on fire safety improvement works with the BD and FSD for tenants of Fu Shan Estate to introduce the Ordinance and the relevant works arrangement. Through the aforesaid publicity and explanatory work, the louver enclosure works in Fu Shan Estate has been implemented smoothly and no complaint related to the relevant works was received during the works period.

The HD will make reference to the practice of Fu Shan Estate in conducting the publicity and explanatory work to PRH tenants in proceeding relevant improvement works in other PRH estates in future.

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## **LCQ16: Short-term parking arrangements for delivery couriers**

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

It has been reported that the new communities of Queen's Hill Estate and Shan Lai Court in Fanling, with a population of more than 30 000, have great demand for the services of online delivery platforms. However, some of the relevant trade unionists have reflected that the management offices of these housing estates have not considered the need of delivery couriers for short-term parking of their motorcycles. Not only have the management offices failed to provide temporary parking spaces, they have also stepped up their efforts to impound motorcycles and have even lodged complaints with the Police about motorcycles obstructing roads, resulting in delivery couriers often having to pay impounding charges and fines for penalty tickets. Such trade unionists hope that the relevant estate management offices and the Police can take into account the principles of legality, reasonableness and compassion in their actions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views about the varying standards of the management offices of different public housing estates in managing the short-term parking of delivery couriers' motorcycles in the housing estates, which has left delivery couriers at a loss, whether the authorities will consider providing guidelines for all parties to follow; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will keep abreast with the need to develop the platform economy by using the housing estates with recent population intakes (e.g. Queen's Hill Estate) as pilot estates to provide "designated motorcycle parking spaces for delivery" within or near the housing estates to allow delivery couriers to park their motorcycles for short periods; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it will follow the practice of the Mainland and set up "courier posts" in various districts to provide areas for resting, eating and using toilets, equipped with facilities such as water dispensers and first-aid kits, so as to improve the working conditions and well-being of delivery couriers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it has estimated the latest number of local delivery couriers accepting orders through online platforms?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Transport and Logistics Bureau, Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD), a consolidated reply to the Hon Kingsley Wong's question is as follows:

(1) & (2) In general, establishing designated motorcycle parking spaces for delivery services in public housing estates or on public roads nearby requires effective management measures to ensure that these parking spaces

are used as intended, such as restricting the parking purpose and limiting the parking duration based on the circumstances of each public housing estate to avoid prolonged occupancy. At present, motorcycle parking spaces on public roads are open for public use, including food delivery motorcycles. There are no restrictions on the parking use of the parking spaces. The Transport Department endeavours to increase the supply of motorcycle parking spaces on public roads to meet with the keen demand of motorcyclists through various means. It is initially assessed that the feasibility in establishing designated motorcycle parking spaces for a specific purpose is relatively low.

Overall speaking, loading/unloading bays are provided around the domestic blocks in most of the housing estates/courts under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) for vehicles, including delivery motorcycles, to load/unload goods or pick-up/drop-off passengers. Taking into account the prevalent need for short-term parking by various types of vehicles to load/unload goods and pick-up/drop-off passengers, the HA has waived the parking fees for vehicles parked in its loading/unloading bays in all housing estates/courts under the HA's management for up to 30 minutes.

In addition, for roads other than the loading/unloading bays, the Housing Department (HD) or the authorised staff of the housing estates/courts/car park operators will exercise discretion with regard to the actual situation in handling short-term parking by delivery motorcycles and other vehicles in a reasonable and compassionate manner. Given that the specific circumstances and road design vary in different housing estates/courts, the staff concerned will, in handling the matter, consider the needs of delivery couriers and will strike a balance among various factors such as estate management, the impact on other residents and road users, as well as whether the road section concerned is an emergency vehicular access which has to be kept clear at all times for fire appliances, police vehicles or ambulances to carry out rescue and other operations. In general, the staff will first issue a verbal/written warning to request the driver concerned to drive off the illegally parked vehicle. Only when the warning goes unheeded, the driver will receive fixed penalty tickets or have the vehicle impounded in accordance with the law. Couriers can use the loading/unloading bays adjacent to the domestic blocks for short-term parking of their motorcycles to facilitate their delivery services, and the estate staff will handle short-term parking by delivery motorcycles in a reasonable and compassionate manner according to the actual situation. The above arrangements took into account the needs of all the stakeholders.

Queens Hill Estate is a public rental housing estate under the HA, while the neighbouring Shan Lai Court is a sold housing court under the "Home Ownership Scheme". Lung Ma Road and Lung Chun Road, the major roads serving Queens Hill Estate and Shan Lai Court, are restricted roads within Queens Hill Estate. No parking is allowed at any time on these two roads which are under the control of the HD. The housing estate and court concerned are provided with emergency vehicular access to various domestic blocks, each of which is provided with loading/unloading bays in the vicinity with free parking offer for the first 30 minutes to allow short-term parking by

vehicles (including motorcycles). At present, seven and six loading/unloading bays are provided adjacent to the domestic blocks in Queens Hill Estate and Shan Lai Court respectively. These facilities provide spaces for free temporary parking, enabling couriers to promptly deliver services. In addition, 11 hourly motorcycle parking spaces are provided in Queens Hill Estate for visitors (including couriers).

It is noted that some motorcycles/vehicles are parked on Lung Ma Road and Lung Chun Road, of which parking is prohibited at all times, or on the adjacent pedestrian footpaths. There are even vehicles parked illegally on emergency vehicle access in the housing estate/court, posing danger to other road users and pedestrians. Therefore, enforcement actions must be taken. The management agency appointed by the HA is authorised to carry out enforcement actions. Warning banners have been put up in prominent areas on roads to remind drivers that illegal parking will result in their vehicle impounded or issuance of fixed penalty tickets. If illegal parking is identified, the staff will warn the driver on-site to drive away the vehicle as soon as possible; and issue a warning notice if the driver is not present. Should the warning be unheeded, the vehicles concerned will be impounded. According to the record, most of the impounded vehicles were prolonged parking vehicles rather than short-term parking by delivery motorcycles. It can thus be seen that the aforementioned enforcement actions have been carried out in a lawful, reasonable and compassionate manner, and the impact on couriers has been minimal. It is observed that the situation has now been improved and in general couriers would temporarily park their motorcycles on the loading/unloading bays adjacent to the domestic blocks for delivery services.

As for the supply of motorcycle parking spaces, the HD has provided seven additional monthly motorcycle parking spaces in the carpark of Queens Hill Estate since January 2024 having regard to the demand for motorcycle parking spaces and technical feasibility. All these parking spaces have been rented out. The implementation of the above integrated measures has greatly improved the illegal parking situation within Queens Hill Estate and Shan Lai Court, leading to a drop in the number of impounded vehicles.

In view of the limited public spaces in housing estates and the requirement for the provision of emergency vehicular access, loading/unloading bays, pedestrian links as well as the recreational, leisure and greening facilities in accordance with the planning standards, it is not feasible to provide additional "designated motorcycle parking spaces for delivery".

(3) and (4) Commissioned by the Labour Department (LD), the C&SD has contracted out in September 2023 a Thematic Household Survey to collect information on, among others, the characteristics and working conditions of digital platform workers engaging in food and goods delivery services. The household survey is the first of its kind and fieldwork has been completed. Data processing and analysis are underway. The C&SD expected that the key findings of the relevant survey will be available in early 2025.

The Government has always supported the development of different

industries. With the rapid development of platform economy, the Government is very concerned about the working conditions and protection for delivery couriers and digital platform workers. The LD has set up a Liaison Group to facilitate the communication among major food and goods delivery platform operators and labour organisations as well as to encourage platform companies to adopt good practices for enhancing the working conditions and protection for platform workers.

Should there be any measures related to the platform economy, the HD will spare no effort to provide necessary support.

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## **Postal services to Cayman Islands subject to delay**

Hongkong Post announced today (November 6) that, as advised by the postal administration of Cayman Islands, due to the impact of severe weather, mail delivery services to Cayman Islands are subject to delay.

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## **LCQ11: Raising public's Putonghua standard**

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Fei and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

There are views that with the integration of Hong Kong into the overall development of the country, raising the public's Putonghua standard is of significance to enhancing their sense of national identity and patriotic education, and being conversant with Putonghua can help the public better understand the policies, culture and history of the country, thereby deepening their patriotic sentiments and sense of belonging. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the specific measures currently taken by the Government to raise the Putonghua standard of Hong Kong students, so as to enhance their sense of

national identity and awareness of patriotism; whether it has plans to increase the proportion of school curriculum using Putonghua as the teaching medium;

(2) to facilitate the implementation of Putonghua education, whether it has provided targeted professional training to teachers to raise their standard of teaching in Putonghua; whether a dedicated training fund or scholarship has been established to support teachers to pursue further studies in Putonghua;

(3) whether it has policies or plans to raise civil servants' Putonghua standard; whether it will include the Putonghua proficiency test as a criterion for the recruitment and promotion of civil servants; if so, of the specific arrangements; and

(4) whether it has conducted surveys on the implementation of Putonghua education in Hong Kong at present to assess its effectiveness; if so, of the assessment outcome for recent years; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Under the "one country, two systems", Hong Kong's policy on language education is to develop the biliterate and trilingual abilities of our students, enabling them to express themselves and communicate fluently in Putonghua, English and Cantonese. Putonghua is the standard Chinese language of our country. It is also a symbol of our nation. A good mastery of Putonghua not only enhances expression and communication but also facilitates integration into the overall development of the country, boosting national pride and confidence.

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Tang Fei is as follows:

(1), (2) and (4) The Education Bureau (EDB) has been actively promoting the teaching and learning of Putonghua, and adopting a multi-pronged strategy, which covers the aspects of curriculum, learning and teaching support, student activities and teachers' professional development, to promote students' learning of Putonghua within and beyond the classroom.

Curriculum

Since 1998, Putonghua has officially been included as a core subject at the primary and junior secondary levels to ensure that all primary and secondary school students can master Putonghua. We will continue to review the curriculum, closely keep in view the grading standards and the testing outlines of the Putonghua Proficiency Test for secondary and primary school students (pilot version) promulgated by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the State Language Commission (SLC), and make timely refinement to the curriculum of the Putonghua subject for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, so as to align with the national standards



and enhance the effectiveness of Putonghua learning and teaching.

### Learning and teaching support

To support the learning and teaching of Putonghua, the EDB has been developing diversified learning and teaching resources for reference and use by teachers and students. These include enhancing the content and the functions of the "Tong Da Xue Pu" self-learning website, producing resource materials such as a Glossary of Easily-mispronounced Terms, a game booklet on the Correct Pronunciation and Application of Putonghua and the "Voice and Expression: Learning Materials for Reading Aloud in Putonghua with Background Music for Primary and Secondary Schools", as well as preparing school exemplars.

Furthermore, the EDB provides school-based support services for primary and secondary schools, collaborating with teachers to enhance the learning and teaching of Putonghua in schools such as developing Pinyin teaching, encouraging students to read aloud, telling stories relating to classical Chinese poetry, and designing various Putonghua learning activities. The EDB also works under the Mainland-Hong Kong Teachers Exchange and Collaboration Programme to arrange for Mainland expert teachers to enhance teachers' professional capacity in implementing Putonghua teaching through on-site collaboration, teacher networks, open lessons and teacher professional development activities.

To further promote the effective use of Putonghua by students so as to boost their national pride and national confidence, the Chief Executive has also announced in his 2024 Policy Address that the EDB would earmark approximately \$200 million in the Language Fund for providing a one-off grant to each public sector primary and secondary school in the 2024/25 school year. This grant aims to enrich the Putonghua language environment and enhance the atmosphere for learning Putonghua.

### Multifarious activities and Mainland exchange

The EDB has all along been encouraging schools to organise multifarious activities to give students more opportunities to use Putonghua on and off campus. The EDB also collaborates with schools, educational organisations and social organisations to regularly organise various kinds of Putonghua activities for students such as the Putonghua Public Speaking Competition for Primary and Secondary Schools. The Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) makes use of the Language Fund to encourage and provide funding to different sectors of the community to conduct a variety of Putonghua activities, thereby creating a diversified Putonghua learning environment for students outside the classroom. Since the 2019/20 school year, a total grant of over \$60 million has been approved by the SCOLAR to fund projects initiated by different organisations for the promotion of Putonghua, including interactive theatres, radio dramas, video production, quiz competitions, public speaking contests and community exploration activities, and the attendance of beneficiary students has exceeded 400 000. According to the feedback gathered by the organisers and the observations by

the SCOLAR Secretariat, participating students were able to speak Putonghua with enthusiasm and they demonstrated good Putonghua proficiency in general.

In addition, by means of the Sister School Scheme and Mainland exchange and study tours, students are provided with opportunities to practise Putonghua, enrich their vocabulary and enhance their communication skills in an authentic environment through interacting and exchanging with their Mainland counterparts, touring different visiting spots and participating in relevant learning activities, etc.

#### Professional training and development of teachers

The policy on Language Proficiency Requirement (LPR) has been implemented by the EDB since the 2000/01 school year. Under this policy, all teachers of the Putonghua subject holding a regular post in publicly-funded schools (Note) have to fulfil the language proficiency requirements. With the introduction of the enhanced LPR announced by the EDB recently, starting from the 2024/25 school year, all new or newly deployed teachers of the Putonghua subject holding a regular post should attain Grade A, Level 2 or above in the Test of Proficiency in Putonghua conducted by the SLC and obtain the attained result in the Classroom Language Assessment within the first year of taking up teaching the subject.

To further encourage teachers to enhance their mastery of Putonghua, this year the EDB launches the Sponsorship Scheme for Teachers Taking the National Putonghua Proficiency Test, under which all serving and prospective teachers (including but not limited to teachers teaching Chinese Language and Putonghua subjects) employed in publicly-funded primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong will be fully sponsored by the Language Fund to take the Putonghua Proficiency Test once. The aim is to reinforce the atmosphere for using Putonghua in school.

Other than these, the EDB provides in-service training on different themes for Putonghua teachers every year, which includes curriculum interpretation, teaching of listening and speaking, teaching of Pinyin, tackling learning difficulties, learning assessment and creating an environment conducive to language learning. These training courses aim to enhance the teaching quality and skills of in-service teachers with contents further expanded to include performing arts, pragmatics, as well as communication and application of Putonghua to enhance their linguistic competence. In addition, the EDB encourages teachers to enrol in the online programme on Capacity Building Relating to the Teaching and Promotion of Putonghua for Teachers of Primary and Secondary Schools in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao offered by the Ministry of Education. Literary and cultural study trips to the Mainland have also been organised for teachers to promote exchanges, broaden their horizon and enhance their teaching abilities.

The EDB and the Department of Education of Guangdong Province co-organise the Advanced Course on Teaching of Putonghua every year to uplift the professional standards of Putonghua teachers through immersive training courses and lesson observation activities. So far, 612 Putonghua teachers

have completed the course since its first launch in 1999.

## Effectiveness evaluation

The EDB has been using different channels such as curriculum development visits and inspections to understand the work of schools in uplifting students' language proficiency (including the promotion of Putonghua education) and will make recommendations on improvement as necessary. Following the introduction of the enhanced School Development and Accountability framework in the 2022/23 school year, schools have to focus more on the seven learning goals (including language proficiency of students) in conducting the annual school self-evaluation (SSE). During the process, schools will collect the SSE information and data for integrative use to evaluate their effectiveness in related work. As observed from school inspections, schools would take into account their school-based circumstances and adopt diversified approaches to encourage students' learning of Putonghua through application. For example, they would create a rich Putonghua learning environment within the schools and arrange students to participate in Putonghua-related activities held inside and outside their schools so as to increase students' ability and interest in the use of Putonghua.

According to the results of the 2021 Thematic Household Survey published by the Census and Statistics Department, 85.7 per cent of the responding students perceived their language competence in Putonghua for daily use as totally sufficient, sufficient or average. The percentage has been rising steadily over the past ten years.

The EDB will continue to create more opportunities for teachers and students to practise Putonghua and enrich the Putonghua learning environment to enhance the Putonghua proficiency of teachers and students in Hong Kong.

(3) Having consulted the Civil Service Bureau, response to part (3) of the question is set out below:

Chinese and English are both the official languages of Hong Kong. It is the Government's policy to maintain a fully biliterate and trilingual civil service to ensure effective communication with the public in discharging their official duties.

Heads of Department/Grade would, having regard to the job requirements of the grades under their purview, specify appropriate language proficiency requirements as part of the entry requirements of the grades concerned. In assessing whether candidates meet the Putonghua proficiency required by the grade concerned, the recruiting department/grade may, having regard to its operational needs, decide on the appropriate assessment method(s), such as requiring candidates to answer questions in Putonghua during selection interviews, or requiring candidates to attain specific results in designated Putonghua proficiency tests.

While maintaining the standard of public services, the Government will from time to time review the language proficiency requirements of various

civil service grades to ensure that they commensurate with the job requirements and allow people of different backgrounds to join the civil service. The Civil Service Bureau is also dedicated to strengthening Putonghua training through arranging courses and web resources for civil servants. The contents include Putonghua for conducting exchange at work, methods to learn and better communicate in Putonghua, with a view to enhancing the overall ability of the civil service in using Putonghua.

Note: These include all teachers of Putonghua holding a regular post in aided schools, as well as teachers of Putonghua in government schools, caput schools, Direct Subsidy Scheme schools and private primary/secondary day schools offering a formal curriculum who are comparable to teachers holding a regular post in aided schools.

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## **Building Safety Carnivals to be held over next two weekends**

The Buildings Department (BD) will hold Building Safety Carnivals at Tuen Mun Town Plaza Phase One and Olympian City Two on November 9 and 10 (Saturday and Sunday); and November 16 and 17 (Saturday and Sunday) respectively.

Building Safety Carnival is one of the major events of Building Safety Weeks 2024. The carnival will feature game booths with an aim to help members of the public acquire proper building safety knowledge in a fun and engaging way. Participants will receive souvenirs upon completion of the games. The BD's mascots Ah Build and Ah Ding will also attend to meet visitors and pose for photos.

Details of the Building Safety Carnival are as follows:

Date: November 9 and 10 (Saturday and Sunday)

Time: 11am to 8pm

Venue: Main Atrium, 1/F, Tuen Mun Town Plaza I

Date: November 16 and 17 (Saturday and Sunday)

Time: 11am to 8pm

Venue: Event Hall, G/F, Olympian City 2

Admission is free and members of the public are welcome.