

Works suspension of Revitalisation of Tsui Ping River

The Drainage Services Department (DSD) announced today (January 19) that in the course of the foundation works in the vicinity of Wai Fat Road near Wai Yip Street in Kwun Tong under the Revitalisation of Tsui Ping River project, the reading recorded on January 12 in a settlement monitoring checkpoint installed on a parapet wall near Wai Fat Road had reached 28 millimetres, exceeding the pre-set trigger level for works suspension (25mm). As a result, the contractor immediately suspended the above-mentioned works.

The DSD and relevant departments arranged inspection for the roads and facilities in the vicinity and confirmed that they are structurally safe, while the settlement has been stabilised. The DSD has already requested the contractor to formulate relevant mitigation measures, including adopting construction methods that can minimise impacts on the above-mentioned roads and facilities in the vicinity. The DSD will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Upon receipt of the contractor's request for resumption of works, the DSD and relevant departments will scrutinise the application, with a view to ensuring the structural safety of the above roads and facilities. Moreover, if the contractor proposes to revise the pre-set trigger level(s) for suspension of works, the DSD will consider the proposal having regard to the circumstances after consulting the stakeholders of the said roads and facilities, and other relevant government departments. When the request for resumption of suspended works has been accepted, the DSD will announce the arrangement to the public.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (January 19), 28 patients who had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus (case numbers: 12575, 12619, 12660, 12671, 12682, 12713, 12722, 12731, 12755, 12760, 12762, 12765, 12772, 12777, 12803, 12806, 12812, 12831, 12838, 12845, 12863, 12868, 12876, 12912, 12938, 12951, 12956 and 12958) were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 12 474 patients have been discharged.

A total of 342 patients who had tested positive are currently hospitalised in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre,

the Hospital Authority (HA) Infectious Disease Centre and the Community Treatment Facility at AsiaWorld-Expo. All of them are in stable condition.

The HA will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

CHP investigates seven confirmed and nine asymptomatic additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) today (January 19) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, January 19, the CHP was investigating seven additional confirmed cases and nine additional asymptomatic cases in the past 24 hours (i.e. there were 16 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus confirmed by the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch in those 24 hours). This brings the total number of confirmed cases to 12 880 so far, while the figures for asymptomatic cases and re-positive cases recorded since January 1 are 199 and three respectively, i.e. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 13 082 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The newly reported cases consist of nine imported cases, four cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases, two local cases, and one case epidemiologically linked with local case. Thirteen of the cases involve mutant strains, while the mutation test results of the remaining three cases are pending. The patients comprise 11 males and five females, aged 3 to 79. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

The four cases epidemiologically linked with imported cases are 13074 and 13075 (3-year-old girl and 42-year-old female who live in a unit 14, the same unit as the residence of case 13045 but on different floors at Tung Moon House, Tai Hang Tung Estate, Sham Shui Po), 13079 (16-year-old male who is a classmate of case 13069) and 13084 (8-year-old girl who stayed in the same hotel room with case 13045 during quarantine and is a family member of cases 13063, 13065, 13066 and 13068). The two local cases are 13072 (26-year-old female who lives in 72-74 Broadway, Mei Foo Sun Chuen Phase 3, Lai Chi Kok) and 13085 (79-year-old male who lives in Yat Kwai House, Kwai Chung Estate, Kwai Chung). The case epidemiologically linked with local case is 13073 (73-year-old male who is a family member of case 13059 living together).

A total of 305 cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been reported in the past 14 days (January 5 to 18). Seventy-two of them are

epidemiologically linked with imported cases/possibly import-related cases, three are local cases, one is a case epidemiologically linked with local case, and the rest are imported cases.

According to the testing and quarantine arrangements for cases with mutant strains, persons who resided or worked within the same building as the residence of relevant cases will be subject to compulsory testing on specified dates in accordance with the announcement by the DH. They will also be required to undergo self-monitoring until the 21st day (see the details of the buildings and dates of testing at www.coronavirus.gov.hk/pdf/CTN_Specified_premises_and_Dates_of_Testing.pdf).

The CHP strongly reminded members of the public to strictly follow the compulsory testing requirements and undergo the multiple tests on time as required. The compulsory testing requirement applies to those who have completed a COVID-19 vaccination course as well. The Government will seriously verify whether they had complied with the testing notices. Any person who fails to comply with the testing notices commits an offence and may be fined a fixed penalty of \$5,000. The person would also be issued with a compulsory testing order requiring him or her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the order is an offence and the offender would be liable to a fine at level 4 (\$25,000) and imprisonment for six months. Relevant officers of different government departments are empowered to perform certain functions under the relevant Regulations under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599), including requesting individuals to provide information and assistance when necessary. Any person who fails to comply with the relevant request commits an offence and would be liable to a fine at level 3 (\$10,000). The Government reiterates that the aim of issuing a compulsory testing notice is to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community as soon as possible to protect overall public health and safety.

With the higher transmissibility and risk of infection of the Omicron mutant strain, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to comply with the recently tightened social distancing measures in the next two weeks, and to refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings (particularly religious or cross-family activities and gatherings). This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

â€‹The spokesman for the CHP stressed, "The global situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and there is a continuous increase in the number of cases involving mutant strains that carry higher transmissibility, and there are also reports of breakthrough infections in some vaccinated individuals. The CHP strongly urges members of the public to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong, in particular to specified places with high risk under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Regulation of Cross-boundary Conveyances and Travellers) Regulation (Cap. 599H)."

LCQ18: Housing supply

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 19):

Question:

The housing problem in Hong Kong is acute. The Government of the last term reintroduced the Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS) with a view to alleviating the social conflicts arising from the housing problem, but the housing problem still aggravated persistently in recent years. The average waiting time (AWT) of general applicants for public rental housing (PRH) rose to 5.9 years in September last year, and the number of inadequately housed households also reached a new high of 127 000 last year. However, according to the LTHS Annual Progress Report 2020 published by the Transport and Housing Bureau last month, the future 10-year housing supply target is no different from that of the preceding year, and there is no timetable for reducing the number of subdivided units (SDUs). Society in general criticises the aforesaid report at odds with reality and fails to address the call for a reformist mindset in respect of the housing problem. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will consider incorporating into LTHS three major objectives of "allocating PRH units to applicants within three years", "helping youths in home ownership" and "bidding farewell to SDUs and small flats"; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will consider replacing the current approach of housing demand projection, which is mainly predicated on "net increases in the number of households", with a "target-oriented" approach, as well as raising the future 10-year public housing supply target to at least 45 000 a year, so as to achieve "zero case backlog" in respect of PRH applications, restore the vision of three years' AWT for general PRH applicants, and help youths in home ownership; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider achieving the objective of bidding farewell to SDUs through increasing the supply of different types of public housing?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

The Government formulated the Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS) in December 2014 and established three major strategic directions: (i) to provide more public rental housing (PRH) units and ensure the rational use of

existing resources; (ii) to provide more subsidised sale flats (SSFs), expand the forms of subsidised home ownership and facilitate market circulation of existing stock to help low- to middle-income families meet their home ownership aspirations; and (iii) to stabilise the residential property market through steady land supply and appropriate demand-side management measures, and promote good sales and tenancy practices for private residential properties.

According to the LTHS, the Government updates the long term housing demand projection annually and presents a rolling 10-year housing supply target to capture social, economic and market changes over time, and makes timely adjustments where necessary. The 10-year total housing supply target is derived according to the results of the housing demand projection for the coming 10 years. Such projection is based on objective data on four demand components, namely net increase in the number of households, households displaced by redevelopment, inadequately housed households (IHHs) and miscellaneous factors (note 1). We have been conducting the housing demand projection for the coming 10 years based on the established mechanism under the LTHS framework and objective data in order to set the 10-year housing supply target. With the efforts of the society and the Government, we can then plan early to identify land for housing development so as to meet the housing demand for the coming 10 years.

According to the said housing demand projection mechanism, the total housing demand for the 10-year period from 2022-23 to 2031-32 is estimated to be 422 800 units. We have therefore set the housing supply target at 430 000 units. The public/private split of new housing supply maintains at 70:30, hence the public and private housing supply targets for the above 10-year period are 301 000 units and 129 000 units respectively. As demand for different types of public housing has remained strong, the ratio between PRH/Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH) and other SSFs also maintains at 70:30. Correspondingly, the public housing supply target of 301 000 units comprises 210 000 units for PRH/GSH and 91 000 units for other SSFs. We will continue to review the relevant ratios in the annual update under the LTHS each year. Relevant projection details are set out at the annex of the LTHS Annual Progress Report 2021 (note 2).

As announced in the 2021 Policy Address and the LTHS Annual Progress Report 2021, the Government has identified about 350 hectares of land which is estimated to be able to provide about 330 000 public housing units in the said 10-year period. In other words, it can fully meet the public housing demand of 301 000 units.

The Hon Lee suggested incorporating the target of providing the first flat offer to PRH general applicants (i.e. family and elderly one-person applicants) at around three years on average into the housing demand projection of the LTHS. In fact, providing the first flat offer to PRH general applicants at around three years on average has always been the target of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA)'s work. In order to achieve this target, the Government will continue to spare no efforts in identifying land for housing development; while the HA will also strive to compress the

time required for housing development where feasible. To further boost the public housing supply, the Government and the HA have implemented a series of measures to increase housing supply as far as possible. Such measures include increasing the plot ratio of public housing sites; adopting new technologies; studying the adoption of the Design-and-Build procurement model in suitable projects; as well as the clearance of Shek Lei Interim Housing for public housing development; redevelopment of the HA's four factory estates for public housing use; additional development within or near existing public rental estates; and studying the redevelopment of Sai Wan Estate and Ma Tau Wai Estate with a view to including the adjacent areas into the redevelopment sites as far as possible so as to enlarge the site area, etc.

Helping low- to middle-income families (including young people) achieve home ownership has always been one of the strategic directions of the LTHS. In June 2018, we revised the pricing mechanism for the Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) and GSH, such that the pricing of HOS and GSH flats is delinked from market prices and is based on affordability instead, with the median monthly income of a non-owner occupier household adopted as the basis of the affordability test. In addition, within the term of the current Government, the HA has offered a total of 38 600 SSFs for sale, and also accelerated the sale of unsold Tenants Purchase Scheme flats to Green Formers. On January 6, 2022, the HA also decided that upon the completion of the Sale of GSH Flats 2020/21, any remaining GSH flats in Ching Fu Court will be put up for sale to eligible PRH applicants through the platform of the annual Express PRH Flat Allocation Scheme exercise. All the above measures can help low- to middle-income families (including young people) gain access to home ownership.

In terms of private residential properties, the Government has also implemented various demand-side management measures for residential properties to effectively reduce short-term speculative activities, external and investment demand, so as to ensure the healthy development of the residential property market.

As for incorporating "bidding farewell to subdivided units (SDUs) and small flats" into the policy objectives of the LTHS, as pointed out above, one of the demand components of the housing demand projection under the LTHS are IHHs. Therefore, addressing the housing needs of SDU residents has always been one of the objectives of the LTHS in setting the 10-year housing supply target. As the living conditions of many SDUs are less than ideal, we will try to meet the housing needs of low-income individuals and families through increasing the supply of transitional housing in order to improve their living conditions and thereby reduce the number of SDUs with poor living environment. In the long run, with adequate public housing supply, the problem of SDUs will be reduced.

Before housing supply is in place, the Government has recently implemented three breakthrough measures to improve the livelihood of families in poor living conditions and have been waiting for PRH for a prolonged period of time, which include:

(i) increasing the supply of transitional housing: as at December 2021, the Government has identified land for providing over 17 000 transitional housing

units. We have further increased the supply target from 15 000 units to 20 000 units, and increased the amount of funding from \$8.3 billion to \$11.6 billion for non-government organisations to implement transitional housing projects;

(ii) launching the three-year Cash Allowance Trial Scheme (CATS): the Government launched the three-year CATS in late June 2021 to relieve the pressure on livelihood of grassroots families which have waited for PRH allocation for a prolonged period of time. As at end-December 2021, the Government had disbursed cash allowances to about 67 000 eligible PRH general applicant households; and

(iii) implementing the tenancy control of SDUs: the tenancy control of SDUs will take effect on January 22, 2022 to provide tenants with the much needed security of tenure and protect them from unwarranted rent hikes on tenancy renewal, without unduly compromising the interests and private property rights of landlords. The Rating and Valuation Department (RVD) has set up a new section responsible for the implementation of the legislation. The Government has also engaged non-government organisations to set up six District Service Teams to assist the RVD in promoting the new legislation to implement the tenancy control on SDUs at district level.

Note 1: The miscellaneous factors include (a) private permanent living quarters occupied by households with mobile residents only; (b) non-local students who may take up accommodation in Hong Kong; and (c) non-local buyers who take up flats without selling or leasing them.

Note 2: The relevant document is available on the following website:
www.thb.gov.hk/eng/policy/housing/policy/lths/LTHS_Annual_Progress_Report_2021.pdf

Hong Kong Customs steps up enforcement to combat illicit cigarettes activities before Lunar New Year (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs conducted a special operation to combat illicit cigarettes activities on January 7 and 15. During the operation, Customs seized a total of about 31 million suspected illicit cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$86 million and a duty potential of about \$59 million. A man was arrested.

Customs officers first intercepted a container truck in Ping Che, Fanling, in the afternoon of January 7 and seized about 10 million suspected

illicit cigarettes inside a 40-foot container. A 69-year-old man was arrested.

Customs officers later searched a 40-foot container at a metal hut in Ping Shan, Yuen Kong, in the afternoon of January 15 and seized about 10 million suspected illicit cigarettes. After a follow-up investigation, officers searched another 40-foot container at a logistics site in Tsing Yi and further seized about 11 million suspected illicit cigarettes.

During the operation, Customs detained a container truck and three containers suspected to be connected to the case.

Investigations of the above-mentioned two cases are ongoing. Customs will continue to trace the source and flow of the illicit cigarettes. The likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

With the Lunar New Year around the corner, Customs will continue to step up enforcement to vigorously combat illicit cigarette activities through risk assessment, intelligence analysis and interception at source before and during the holiday.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

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Members of the public may report any suspected illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).

