

Budget promotes a caring and high-quality living environment

Announcing his 2019-20 Budget today (February 27), the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, emphasised measures to improve Hong Kong's living environment and promote a caring society.

On housing, Mr Chan said that about 100 400 public housing units would be produced over the next five years (2019 to 2023).

Over the same period the private sector, on average, will complete about 18 800 residential units annually, an increase of about 20 per cent over the past five years.

Mr Chan said the 2019-20 Land Sale Programme comprised 15 residential sites, including seven new sites, capable of providing 8 800 plus residential units.

"Together with railway property development projects, the Urban Renewal Authority's projects and private development/redevelopment projects, the potential land supply for the whole year is expected to have a capacity to produce about 15 500 units," Mr Chan said.

The Government will include seven commercial sites in the 2019-20 Land Sale Programme. They are estimated to provide about 814 600 square metres of floor area, which can provide a maximum of about 2 900 hotel rooms.

Mr Chan proposed setting aside \$2 billion to support non-governmental organisations in constructing transitional housing, designed to accommodate people who are waiting for public housing units to become available and living in inadequate accommodation.

He also earmarked \$22 billion for the first batch of projects under the "single site, multiple use" initiative, which aims to optimise land use by consolidating related government services and facilities in the same building.

To cope with growing demands on the Hospital Authority (HA) brought about by Hong Kong's increasing population and demographic changes, Mr Chan proposed various spending initiatives to fully support the HA, including:

- * \$10 billion to set up a public healthcare stabilisation fund for any unexpected circumstances;
- * An additional \$5 billion for the HA to expedite the upgrading and acquisition of medical equipment;
- * Additional recurrent subvention of \$400 million for the HA to expand the scope of the Drug Formulary. This would increase the HA's total expenditure on drugs to \$6 billion in 2019-20; and

* Additional HA recurrent funding of over \$700 million for various measures to boost the morale of staff under heavy workload and retain talent.

Mr Chan designated \$1.2 billion to establish the Hong Kong Genome Institute and take forward the project to help promote the clinical application of genomic medicine and related innovative scientific research.

To help meet the demand for welfare facilities in urban areas, Mr Chan set aside \$20 billion for the purchase of 60 properties. These will accommodate more than 130 welfare facilities, including day child care centres, neighbourhood elderly centres and on-site pre-school rehabilitation services, benefiting some 86 000 people.

To enhance the mental health and stress resilience of teenagers, the Government will implement a "two school social workers for each school" measure in more than 460 secondary schools from the 2019/20 school year, increasing supervisory manpower accordingly. This would require an annual recurrent expenditure of about \$310 million.

Promoting smart city development, Mr Chan reserved \$300 million to develop a geospatial data-sharing platform and 3D digital maps of Hong Kong.

To encourage the use of electric vehicles (EVs), the Government was exploring ways to encourage the installation of EV charging facilities at car parks in existing buildings.

Mr Chan also proposed allocating \$120 million to extend the public EV charging networks at government car parks.

Striving to build a more liveable city, Mr Chan said he will reserve \$6 billion to develop, expand and enhance promenades and open space on either side of Victoria Harbour.

He also proposed setting up a \$200 million Urban Forestry Support Fund to strengthen public education and promote arboriculture and horticulture trainee programmes.

To enrich cultural offerings and consolidate Hong Kong's position as an international cultural hub, Mr Chan proposed additional funding of \$176 million for the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. The money would be used to host and arrange telecasts of large-scale, world-class performing arts programmes over the coming five years.

Meanwhile, local elite athletes pursuing academic studies will benefit from an injection of \$250 million into the Hong Kong Athletes Fund to increase scholarship awards.

"People work hard every day to enhance the quality of life," Mr Chan said.

"We will also strive for economic development to make Hong Kong a more

ideal place for living. The Government will continue to make good use of our resources to achieve this goal and serve people's needs."