

LC: CS presents Government Minute in response to Report of Public Accounts Committee No. 71

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in presenting the Government Minute in response to the Report of the Public Accounts Committee No. 71 in the Legislative Council today (May 15):

President,

Laid on the table today is the Government Minute (GM) responding to Report No. 71 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

When presenting Report No. 71 to the Legislative Council on 20 February 2019, the Chairman of PAC offered comments on a chapter in the Director of Audit's Report No. 71, namely, "Centre for Food Safety: Management of food safety". I welcome the Report of PAC and am grateful for the time and effort that the Chairman and Members of PAC devoted to examining this subject. The Government accepts PAC's various recommendations and sets out in detail the specific responses of the relevant bureaux and departments in the GM. I would like to highlight the key measures that the Government has taken in the above-mentioned policy area and the progress achieved.

The Government attaches great importance to safeguarding food safety. We agree that there are certain areas for improvement in the daily operation of the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and accept the various recommendations raised by PAC. CFS will continue to discharge its food safety management responsibilities to ensure a stable and sound food safety regime and a high standard of food safety in Hong Kong.

CFS has set up a task group, chaired by its Controller, to take forward the recommendations of the Audit Commission and PAC. The task group has commenced comprehensive reviews on CFS' operational manuals and guidelines, staff management and supervision arrangements, training requirements, and manpower and resource requirements. CFS has started to roll out concrete and effective short-, medium- and long-term measures to enhance its effectiveness by phases, including updating the guidelines where there are inadequacies or ambiguities, enhancing training and supervision of the frontline staff and strengthening staff's law enforcement mindset and the keeping of data and records.

In addition, CFS already put in place a dedicated team in end-2017 to look closely at its operational workflow, revamp its information technology (IT) systems for higher efficiency, and enhance its mode of operation through IT to support the work of its frontline staff and reinforce its capability in

food import control, surveillance, incident management, risk assessment and traceability. Phased improvements to the IT systems of CFS will start from end-2019.

CFS is making efforts to enhance its risk assessment work. In particular, the second population-based food consumption survey (FCS) would be expedited for completion by mid-2021. CFS will also start the planning for a FCS on the younger population and the second total diet study. CFS will carry out various risk assessment studies having regard to its competing priorities.

CFS reviews the Food Surveillance Programme (FSP) on an annual basis and from time to time during the year as and when necessary. Under a risk-based approach, CFS has started to reallocate resources for testing relatively low-risk food hazards to testing of other food hazards. It has also increased the proportion of online food samples for microbiological testing. Regarding the collection of food samples under the FSP and the delivery of food samples to laboratories for testing, CFS has promulgated new operational guidelines to frontline staff and taken measures to enhance staff supervision and training to ensure their compliance with the guidelines.

As regards the management of food incidents and complaints, to minimise the lead time from taking food samples arising from food incidents or complaints to publicising the testing results of unsatisfactory samples, and to monitor the follow-up actions on food complaints more effectively, CFS has revised the relevant guidelines to enhance the sampling procedures and put in place the compilation of weekly complaint management information for review by its Food Complaint Risk Analysis Panel led by a directorate officer at regular intervals. CFS has also stepped up the monitoring of food recall exercises carried out by food traders, including publishing updated guidelines to specify clearly that food traders must dispose of the recalled foods under the supervision of CFS' staff. A template for food traders to submit regular progress reports and provide the required information has also been formulated.

CFS will continue to provide food safety information and advice to the public through various channels. In view of the increasing popularity of social media, CFS has further strengthened the use of its Facebook page and enriched its multimedia materials on the Internet to enhance communication with the public on food safety risks.

President, I would like to thank the Chairman and all Members of PAC again for their effort and guidance. Relevant bureaux and departments will strictly adhere to their responses in the GM and implement improvement measures as soon as possible to ensure the proper use of public funds.

Thank you, President.