

LC: Speech by CS in presenting Government Minute in response to Report No. 76 of Public Accounts Committee

Following is the speech (translated from Chinese) by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr John Lee, in presenting the Government Minute in response to Report No. 76 of the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislative Council today (September 29):

President,

Laid on the table today is the Government Minute (GM) responding to Report No. 76 of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) presented to the Legislative Council on July 14, 2021.

I welcome the Report of the PAC and am grateful for the time and efforts devoted by the Chairman, the Hon Abraham Shek, and members of the PAC on it. The Government accepts the PAC's various recommendations and sets out in detail in the GM the specific responses of the relevant bureaux and departments (B/Ds). The Report of the PAC provides recommendations on areas in relation to the following seven chapters in the Director of Audit's Report No. 76:

- (a) management of birth, death and marriage registrations;
- (b) education support measures for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students;
- (c) control of trade in endangered species by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD);
- (d) Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC): efforts in promoting internationally accepted standards and conformity assessment services;
- (e) management of government vehicle fleet by the Government Logistics Department (GLD);
- (f) site formation and associated infrastructure works for development near Choi Wan Road and Jordan Valley; and
- (g) upgrading and operation of Pillar Point Sewage Treatment Works (PPSTW).

I would like to highlight the key measures taken and progress made by the relevant B/Ds in response to the PAC's recommendations.

Management of birth, death and marriage registrations

In respect of the management of birth, death and marriage registrations, the Immigration Department (ImmD) has taken various measures to actively implement the recommendations of the Audit Commission. With regard to the management of birth registration, the ImmD will continue to review the manpower and services of its births registries from time to time. One-stop application services for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region passport

will be introduced at some births registries, with a view to providing greater convenience to the public and enhancing operational efficiency. Moreover, the ImmD will continue to actively follow up on the unregistered birth cases by enhancing the monitoring of case investigation progress and formulating a more effective strategy to identify the whereabouts of the parents concerned.

With regard to the management of death registration, the ImmD has put up notice on its website and updated the guidance note to remind members of the public of the legal requirement of registering deaths from natural causes within 24 hours. The ImmD will require informants who fail to make registration of deaths within the statutory time limit to provide reasons for late registration, so as to enhance the monitoring of relevant cases and to follow up on cases without reasonable grounds. Moreover, the Security Bureau and the ImmD are conducting a review on whether to extend the statutory time limit for registration of deaths. Subject to the outcome of the review, the Government will propose necessary legislative amendments as early as practicable.

With regard to the management of marriage registration, the ImmD will continue to closely monitor service demand at its marriage registries and increase the quotas for conducting marriage ceremonies on popular dates. The ImmD has also adopted measures, including to verify the eligibility of Civil Celebrants of Marriages (CCMs) by checking against the information on the websites of the Law Society of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Society of Notaries on a daily basis, to ensure that persons on the list of CCMs meet the eligibility criteria prescribed in the Marriage Ordinance. Should any irregularity be identified, the ImmD will take follow-up actions as appropriate. Moreover, the ImmD has strengthened the training for CCMs, including arranging those who have not provided any marriage solemnisation service in the previous term to attend a refresher course. The ImmD will continue to strengthen its follow-up on suspected bogus marriage cases by flexibly redeploying manpower to tackle the outstanding cases, enhancing the monitoring of case investigation progress and adopting various measures to identify the whereabouts of the suspects.

With regard to the implementation of the Next Generation Application and Investigation Easy Systems (APPLIES-2), the ImmD will continue to closely monitor the progress and spending position of the project through the multi-tier project governance structure. The ImmD will also ensure that the APPLIES-2 will support the Government's "iAM Smart" Platform and bring better services and greater convenience to users.

Education support measures for NCS students

The Government is committed to encouraging and supporting the integration of NCS students into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language. Starting from the 2014/15 school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented a series of support measures to further enhance the assistance rendered to NCS students for their learning of the Chinese language and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools.

These measures include increasing the additional funding to schools and providing schools with teaching resources, teacher training and professional support. In the light of the Audit Commission's recommendations, the EDB has put in place measures with a view to ensuring that schools can further maximise the use of the relevant funding in a timely manner as well as monitoring and supporting more effectively schools' utilisation of the funding. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, such measures include requiring primary, secondary and special schools as well as kindergartens with a relatively high surplus level of funding to provide the EDB with an improvement plan, and further following up on schools with late submission of plans and reports in a more timely manner.

With a view to enhancing the professional capacity of Chinese Language teachers in teaching NCS students, the EDB has been providing diversified professional development opportunities for teachers. As regards the suggestion of considering whether to set teacher training requirements for primary, secondary and special schools admitting NCS students, the EDB will review the matter having regard to school-based circumstances and teachers' professional development needs. The EDB has commenced the engagement with the school sector and language experts to gather views for the development of feasible options from the school management and professional perspectives.

Control of trade in endangered species by AFCD

The AFCD regulates international trade in and possession of endangered species through a licensing system. To enhance the effectiveness of the regulatory work, the AFCD has reviewed the relevant procedures for regulating the trade in endangered species, including the issue and inspection of license, case investigation and prosecution, and the handling of seized specimens. Based on the results of the review, the department has updated the internal guidelines as appropriate, such as setting the inspection ratio as a mandatory field for inspection reports and increasing the frequency of random checking of inspection reports so as to step up supervision of frontline staff. The AFCD has also reviewed the computer system which supports licensing and enforcement and is enhancing the system functions so as to facilitate a more effective discharge of the regulatory work. The AFCD will continue to keep abreast of the latest developments and applications of forensic technologies for identification of scheduled species and other technologies to enhance work effectiveness through innovative technologies.

ITC: efforts in promoting internationally accepted standards and conformity assessment services

In light of the findings made by the Audit Commission on efforts in promoting internationally accepted standards and conformity assessment services, the ITC will proactively promote the service of the Hong Kong Accreditation Service (HKAS) under its purview and that of the HKAS accredited organisations. The HKAS will continue to conduct thorough market surveys and consult key stakeholders to ascertain market demand when implementing new accreditation programmes. The HKAS will, via different means, encourage public and private sectors as well as B/Ds to use the testing and certification services offered by accredited organisations. Since

January 2021, the HKAS has been conducting remote assessments (i.e. assessments conducted via video conferencing) for assessing organisations that require reassessments, thereby minimising the impact of the epidemic and its associated travel restrictions on reassessment work.

Management of government vehicle fleet by GLD

To enhance the management of government vehicle fleet, the GLD will, when selecting B/Ds for conducting in-depth departmental transport reviews, consider whether their vehicles have repeatedly been captured in vehicle utilisation exception reports. The GLD has flexibly deployed existing manpower and arranged designated staff to follow through a review until its completion, with a view to expediting the review progress.

To facilitate timely procurement of vehicles, the GLD has advanced the invitation and examination of requests from B/Ds for vehicle replacement taking into account the time required by suppliers for vehicle delivery. The GLD will continue to explore measures to enhance the management of the government vehicle fleet based on the recommendations in the Director of Audit's Report.

Site formation and associated infrastructure works for development near Choi Wan Road and Jordan Valley

In light of the findings on site formation and associated infrastructure works for development near Choi Wan Road and Jordan Valley in the Director of Audit's Report, the Civil and Engineering Development Department (CEDD) will continue to implement measures at multiple management levels throughout different stages of a project for better forward planning and management of the generation and demand of fill materials. In addition, the CEDD will continue to explore and apply new technologies and digital tools, such as geophysical survey and topographical survey, in order to complete site investigation works effectively before tendering of the works projects.

Upgrading and operation of PPSTW

The upgrading and operation of the PPSTW was the Drainage Services Department (DSD)'s first sewage treatment work project that has adopted the design-build-operate procurement arrangement. The objective is to leverage the public-private partnership model to enable contractors to engage in the design, construction and subsequent operation stages throughout the project life-cycle. This can drive the industry to adopt innovative or world-wide patent technologies in optimising the sewage treatment process for achieving higher operational efficiency.

In the light of the results of the review by the PAC and the Audit Report on the upgrading works of the PPSTW, the DSD has implemented various improvement measures. They include strengthening the monitoring of the performance of concrete protective coatings and working with a local university to carry out an investigation to identify the root cause of the failure of concrete protective coatings. The DSD has also put in place additional monitoring measures to ensure the compliance of the contractor

with the contractual requirements relating to materials for equipment and facilities. The DSD has also enhanced the co-ordination and liaison between the construction and operation teams to ensure timely completion of the correction works on the defects.

As far as the operation of the PPSTW is concerned, the DSD has adopted various measures, including making use of the Key Performance Indicators' compliance level to supervise the contractor. The contractor's performance will also be duly recorded and reflected in the quarterly performance report. Furthermore, the DSD has issued internal guidelines on conducting surprise checks on effluent quality to specify the procedures and monitoring requirement of effluent quality. It has also upgraded the Computerised Maintenance Management (CMM) System to ensure timely completion of the corrective and preventive maintenance works.

The DSD has drawn on the experience gained from the PPSTW project and is committed to making continuous improvement. Having regard to the Audit Commission's recommendations, the DSD will strengthen the communication and co-ordination with the operating team and enhance monitoring measures with a view to achieving higher operational efficiency. The DSD will continue to make good use of advanced technology, such as the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition System and the CMM System, to effectively manage the operation and maintenance tasks. The DSD will also strengthen communication with other relevant departments to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the management and maintenance of sewage treatment works.

President, I would like to thank the Chairman and members of the PAC again for their efforts and suggestions. The concerned B/Ds will strictly adhere to their responses and implement improvement measures as set out in the GM.

Thank you, President.