

LCQ10: Burial services and facilities

Following is a question by the Hon Chung Kwok-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 12):

Question:

It has been learnt that burial services and facilities in Hong Kong, particularly that of public columbarium niches, have all along been in short supply. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the mortality rate of Hong Kong in each of the past two years and that projected for each of the coming five years;

(2) of the projected number of new public niches to be provided by the Government in each of the coming five years;

(3) according to the projections based on the mortality rates of Hong Kong, of the respective demand for (i) cremation services and (ii) niches in each of the coming five years; whether it has assessed if the total number of public and private niches to be supplied in the coming five years will be sufficient to meet such demand; and

(4) given that the Government has since 2012 been taking forward the project involving the construction of funeral parlours, columbaria and crematoria at Sandy Ridge Cemetery, whether it has assessed, in respect of the burial services and niches to be provided under the project in the first 10 years upon project completion, (i) if they will then become the major source of supply of burial services and niches in Hong Kong, and (ii) their respective market shares; whether it has assessed the impacts on the medium and long term supply of burial services and facilities in Hong Kong in the event that the project cannot be completed as planned; if so, of the assessment outcome?

Reply:

President,

The numbers of deaths among the Hong Kong population in the past two years (i.e. 2019 and 2020) were 48 706 and 50 653 respectively. Based on the population estimates published by the Census and Statistics Department in September 2020, the projected numbers of deaths for the next five years are tabulated below:

Year	Projected number of deaths
2021	52 200

2022	52 800
2023	53 500
2024	54 300
2025	55 100

At present, the majority of the public have accepted cremation as the mainstream mode of burial arrangements, with the number of cremation accounting for over 90 per cent of the number of deaths. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department estimates that there will be sufficient cremation sessions each year to meet the demand in the next few years. With a growing and ageing local population, the demand for cremation service will be on the rise. We need more such facilities to cater for the medium to long-term demand.

The prevailing practice after cremation is to store ashes in public or private columbaria. The Government is also putting in efforts to promote green burial by encouraging the scattering of cremated ashes at the Gardens of Remembrance or at sea.

The Government implements a district-based columbarium development scheme for the medium and long-term supply of public niches. Between 2011 and the end of 2020, the Government consulted the relevant District Councils on public columbarium projects at 14 sites, which would altogether provide around 600 000 new public niches. Among them, the projects at Diamond Hill in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau, Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Lai Chi Yuen in Mui Wo, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek Phase I have been completed, providing around 210 000 niches. The projects at Cape Collinson Road in Eastern District and Shek Mun in Sha Tin are underway for completion in 2022 and 2024, providing 25 000 and 40 000 niches respectively. In the next few years, with new columbarium projects being completed one after another, it is estimated that about 30 000 to over 40 000 new public niches will become available each year.

Regarding the supply of niches in private cemeteries, the columbarium projects at the Cape Collinson Chinese Permanent Cemetery, the Tsuen Wan Chinese Permanent Cemetery and the Junk Bay Chinese Permanent Cemetery under the Board of Management of the Chinese Permanent Cemeteries are underway. These three projects are estimated to be completed in 2021, 2022 and 2024 respectively, providing a total of over 89 000 new niches.

We will take forward the work of burial facilities having regard to the circumstances.