

LCQ10: Manpower of Lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Chau Siu-chung and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (March 13):

Question:

It is learnt that in recent years, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD)'s recruitment exercises for lifeguards have failed to attain its recruitment targets. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on civil service lifeguards (including senior lifeguards and lifeguards) in each of the past five years: (i) the target number of recruits, (ii) the number of applications received, (iii) the number of applicants invited to attend the recruitment interview, (iv) the number of applicants who passed the trade test, (v) the number of applicants who passed the recruitment interview, (vi) the number of applicants who passed the medical examination and other procedures, (vii) the number of appointment letters issued, (viii) the number of applicants who declined the offer of appointment, (ix) the number of applicants who reported for duty, and (x) the total recruitment expenses incurred in each recruitment exercise, with a breakdown by type of post;

(2) of the following information on non-civil service contract seasonal lifeguards (seasonal lifeguards) in each of the past five years: (i) the target number of recruits, (ii) the number of applications received, (iii) the number of applicants invited to attend the recruitment interview, (iv) the number of applicants who passed the trade test, (v) the number of applicants who passed the recruitment interview, (vi) the number of applicants who passed the medical examination and other procedures, (vii) the number of appointment letters issued, (viii) the number of applicants who declined the offer of appointment, (ix) the number of applicants who reported for duty, and (x) the total recruitment expenses incurred in each recruitment exercise, with a breakdown by type of employment contract terms;

(3) of (i) the estimated expenditure on the employment of seasonal lifeguards by the Government, and (ii) the actual expenditure on the salaries and benefits of such lifeguards in each of the past eight years;

(4) in respect of each aquatic venue under the LCSD in each of the past eight years, of (i) the number of scheduled opening hours of each of its facilities, and (ii) the number of hours during which each of its facilities was closed due to insufficient manpower of lifeguards, with a breakdown by District Council district; and

(5) as the Government indicated at the meeting of the Panel on Public Service of this Council on May 15 last year that it would explore ways to reduce the

reliance on seasonal lifeguards with a view to tackling the problem of shortage of core lifeguards, of the progress and details of the relevant work at present?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the questions raised by the Hon Chau Siu-chung is as follows:

(1) Details of the recruitment exercises of civil service lifeguards (including senior lifeguards and lifeguards) in the past five years are set out at Annex 1.

(2) Details of the recruitment exercises of seasonal lifeguards in the past five years are set out at Annex 2.

(3) The actual expenditure on the recruitment of seasonal lifeguards by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) in the past eight years is set out at Annex 3. As the budget for the recruitment of seasonal lifeguards is subsumed under the overall budget for non-civil service contract staff, the LCSD is unable to provide separate figures for seasonal lifeguards.

(4) With respect of its aquatic venues, the LCSD does not maintain (i) the number of scheduled opening hours of each of its facilities; and (ii) the number of hours during which each of its facilities was closed due to insufficient manpower of lifeguards.

That said, the number of scheduled opening days of LCSD's aquatic venues in the past eight years broken down by District Council district are set out at Annexes 4, 5 and 6 respectively. The number of days of full or partial closure of public swimming pools due to inadequate lifeguards in the past eight years broken down by District Council district are set out in Annex 7, and the number of days of full closure of gazetted beaches are set out in Annex 8. No water sports centres have been closed due to inadequate lifeguards in the past eight years.

(5) Owing to the insufficient supply of lifeguards in the labour market, it has been difficult for the Government to employ adequate seasonal lifeguards in recent years to provide lifesaving services during the swimming season. In order to tackle the manpower shortage, the LCSD has rolled out a series of measures to increase and stabilise the supply of lifeguards. Details of the measures are as follows:

To ensure sufficient manpower at aquatic venues to maintain lifesaving services, in addition to employing full-time seasonal lifeguards, part-time hourly-rated seasonal lifeguards and Post-retirement Service Contract (PRSC) full-time seasonal lifeguards, the LCSD created the post of full-year full-time lifeguard on one-year contract from 2019 to 2022. In 2023, full-year full-time lifeguards were employed on two-year contract and 110 qualified lifeguards reported duty eventually. The LCSD will further employ 70

additional full-year full-time lifeguards on two-year contract in 2024. This will provide more stable working conditions, attracting more qualified persons to become lifeguards.

Moreover, to expedite the recruitment process, the LCSD will invite full-time seasonal lifeguards who have completed their contracts to continue to serve on a part-time basis, and extend the contract period of existing PRSC seasonal lifeguards. Recruitment of PRSC seasonal lifeguards will also continue for the 2024 swimming season to ensure a steady manpower supply.

In order to increase the attractiveness of becoming seasonal lifeguards, the LCSD has enhanced the remuneration package of seasonal lifeguards with reference to those offered by the local private sector, while taking into consideration the services and unique operational needs of public swimming pools and beaches, in order to attract more qualified persons to apply for the post of LCSD seasonal lifeguards. In addition, the LCSD has, having regard to market trends, further enhanced the remuneration package of seasonal lifeguards. Depending on the position as well as the types of lifeguard awards and first-aid certificate held, the salary of a seasonal lifeguard with end-of-contract gratuities may range from \$24,500 to \$26,000 per month. The LCSD has also stepped up its publicity efforts by placing recruitment advertisements on public transport, popular newspapers, social media websites, etc. and displaying recruitment posters at swimming pools and beaches with higher usage rates across the 18 districts. Meanwhile, the LCSD will send letters and distribute recruitment posters to secondary schools/post-secondary institutions/relevant organisations to strengthen its publicity efforts.

In addition, the LCSD launched the "Combined Seasonal Lifeguard Training Scheme" in 2023 to offer full-time training and practice in respect of swimming pool and/or beach lifeguards in a "hire and train" mode, so as to help trainees acquire pool and/or beach lifesaving awards before serving as seasonal lifeguards at LCSD swimming pools or beaches during swimming seasons. While those who already possessed a valid Pool Lifeguard Award can further acquire the Beach Lifeguard Award through the scheme, people with no lifesaving qualifications can also join the scheme. Currently, the monthly training allowance is either \$14,640 or \$16,400, depending on the type of award to be obtained.

The LCSD is actively negotiating with the Hong Kong China Life Saving Society and the Employees Retraining Board and planning to co-organise tailor-made lifesaving training programmes and provide employment services with a view to increasing the supply of lifeguards. Moreover, the LCSD will continue to support the Home Affairs Department in organising lifesaving career talks and training programmes for ethnic minorities (EM) so that the latter can receive formal training to become qualified lifeguards with a view to opening up new labour market. In 2023, the LCSD liaised with EM-serving groups to gauge the interest of EM communities in the aforementioned scheme and actively planned relevant lifesaving training programmes. In 2024, the LCSD will continue to get in touch with relevant EM supporting organisations to promote the lifesaving training programmes to EM.

At the same time, the LCSD is actively planning the preparatory work for outsourcing lifesaving services at designated public swimming pools, and will continue to study the feasibility of importing qualified lifeguards from the Mainland/overseas in consultation with different bureaux/departments (the Civil Service Bureau/the Labour Department) and relevant organisations.