

LCQ11: Inspection of drainage pipes

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (January 27):

Question:

In October last year, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) commenced the Drainage Inspection Programme (DIP) to inspect the above-ground communal drainage pipes of its 1 575 public rental housing (PRH) blocks. The Housing Department (HD) set up a supplementary task force (task force) comprising 87 staff members to carry out the relevant work, and anticipated that the whole programme would take 18 months to complete. It has been reported that since the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, multiple confirmed cases have been found in a number of buildings, and some of such cases involved flats on different floors but facing the same direction, and COVID-19 virus has been detected in the sewage of some PRH blocks. As such, members of the public are very worried about the epidemic spreading through the sewerage systems of buildings. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether HD will increase the manpower of the task force so as to expeditiously complete DIP;
- (2) of the latest progress of DIP, including the up-to-date numbers of PRH blocks and flats identified to have the problem of sewage pipe leakage;
- (3) as HA has indicated that it will accord priority to inspecting the drainage pipes of those housing estates or blocks with COVID-19 confirmed cases, and the order of inspection of other housing estates will depend on factors such as the percentage of the number of their elderly tenants in the total number of tenants, as well as the age of the blocks and their drainage leakage/backflow records, whether HA will expeditiously release the inspection timetable of the various housing estates/blocks, so as to enhance transparency;
- (4) given that among the blocks covered by DIP, 975 blocks (involving 410 000 flats) have the main drainage stacks located inside the flats, whether the staff members of the task force will enter all such flats to conduct inspection; whether the scope of the inspection and repair works covers the connection pipes between the main drainage stacks and the toilets inside the flats; and
- (5) given that the Government engaged consultancy firms last year to proactively inspect the external drainage pipes of the private residential or composite buildings (including subsidized sale housing blocks) exceeding three storeys in height across the territory, in order to reduce the risk of the epidemic spreading, of the latest progress of the relevant work?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Development Bureau, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung is as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has been paying much importance to the conditions of environmental hygiene and drainage pipes of its public rental housing (PRH) estates. In complementing the Government's efforts in fighting the pandemic, HA has stepped up cleaning and disinfection work at common areas and public facilities in housing estates. Technical staff has also been arranged to inspect the drainage facilities of PRH units which share the same drainage system with units with confirmed cases. HA has also allocated additional resources for carrying out drainage inspection works under its existing "Responsive In-flat Maintenance Services" and "Total Maintenance Scheme".

Furthermore, HA launched the "Drainage Inspection Programme" on October 28, 2020 and set up a dedicated inspection task force with additional manpower to implement the programme. During the proactive inspection of drain pipes, HA will carry out appropriate repairs as necessary. The entire programme is expected to be completed within 18 months. The programme involves a large number of PRH units, HA, on one hand, needs to make arrangements with tenants to enter their units for inspection and, on the other, carry out appropriate repairs, hence HA will, depending on the actual need, deploy additional resources to implement the programme with a view to completing the relevant programme as soon as possible.

(2) As at end-December 2020, HA has already carried out detailed inspection of drainage pipes of about 100 000 PRH units. The drainage pipes of over 90 per cent of these units are in satisfactory conditions. Appropriate repair works have been conducted for the remaining ones as necessary. Most cases requiring repair works involve tenants who have made their own alterations to the water closets.

Besides, HA has commenced drainage inspection and repair works in early-January 2021 on 34 PRH blocks that had been subject to compulsory testing. The relevant work is expected to be completed by January 30, 2021.

(3) As for other PRH blocks, HA prioritises the inspection of its PRH units with regard to the conditions of drainage pipes found from the preliminary inspections, maintenance records, percentage of elderly households and the age of housing estates or buildings, etc. Priority is given to drainage pipes in housing estates with confirmed cases. HA will provide the Estate Management Advisory Committee with information regarding the drainage pipe inspection and repair works.

(4) Regarding the situation that some PRH units under the Drainage Inspection Programme have their main drainage pipes installed inside the units, staff of HA's inspection task force will enter the units to inspect the connections to

the communal drainage pipes and conduct repair works as necessary.

(5) For private domestic buildings, the Government has earlier launched a 24-month special measure through the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund to inspect the external drainage systems of buildings (the inspection scheme). Under the inspection scheme, consultants engaged by the Buildings Department (BD) will proactively inspect the external drainage systems of around 20 000 private residential or composite buildings exceeding three storeys in height across the territory. If the relevant drainage systems are found to be defective upon inspection, BD may serve orders under the Buildings Ordinance (BO) (Chapter 123 of the Laws of Hong Kong) to the owners concerned requiring them to arrange necessary further investigations and/or repairs.

To step up public education and publicity, when inspecting the external drainage systems of buildings, staff of BD's consultants will also dispatch relevant materials to owners or occupiers. The consultants will also provide telephone enquiry services to owners.

The inspection scheme has been implemented since June last year. It is expected that the inspection of around 20 000 targeted buildings will be completed in the first quarter of 2022, and the related follow-up actions be completed in the six months after that. As of end-2020, BD's consultants have inspected about 2 500 buildings. Defects at external drainage pipes, including leaking or broken drainage pipes, mis-connection of drainage pipes, etc., were found in some buildings. BD is now reviewing the consultants' reports and will take appropriate actions under the BO depending on the circumstances of the case, including issuing drainage repair orders requiring owners concerned to carry out the necessary repair works.

For the about 950 subsidised sale flats (SSF) buildings developed by HA, they are subject to control under the BO by the Independent Checking Unit (ICU) of the Transport and Housing Bureau according to the authority delegated by the Building Authority (i.e. the Director of Buildings). ICU has been inspecting the communal drainage systems at the external walls of these SSF buildings in line with BD's inspection scheme. It is anticipated that the relevant work will be completed in the first quarter of 2022. For any drainage pipes or ventilating pipes found to be damaged or defective during the inspection, ICU will issue advisory letters or drainage repair orders to the concerned owners or Incorporated Owners, requiring them to arrange inspections and repairs by qualified contractors as soon as possible. As at end-2020, ICU had inspected 107 buildings and the conditions were generally satisfactory.