

LCQ14: The e-154 App

Following is a question by Hon Lam San-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

On June 1, 2021, the Hong Kong Police Force introduced the "e-154 App" (the App) which applies voice input technology. As at March 15, 2022, the Police Force allocated over 900 tablets, 300 smart phones and 240 portable printers to crime officers. However, some people who gave witness statements (statements) at police stations have said that police officers still took statements from them in the traditional way and the process was very time-consuming. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current percentage of the number of statements taken with the use of the App in the total number of statements taken;
- (2) whether the records taken with the use of the App are subsequently processed in electronic form (i.e. when they are delivered to the courts for use in judicial proceedings, and when prosecuting and defence counsel apply for obtaining the relevant records); if not, of the reasons for using paper records; and
- (3) of the total expenditure incurred by the App every year and, compared with the traditional way of taking statements, whether the relevant total expenditure has been reduced?

Reply:

President,

In support of the strategic direction of "Embracing the Use of Technology for Policing in the Digital Age" of the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police), the Police launched the "e-154" App on June 1, 2021. Tablets, smart phones and portable printers were distributed to all police districts. Investigation team officers can take witness statements anytime and anywhere with their portable devices in hand, thereby saving time and enhancing their work efficiency and effectiveness.

After consulting the Police, my reply to different parts of the question is as follows:

- (1) In 2023, the "e-154" App took about 37 200 statements, which was more than six times the figure in 2022, reflecting an increase in the use of the App. As the Police do not maintain statistics on the total number of statements taken over the territory, the percentage mentioned in the question is not available.

(2) In criminal cases, the prosecution has the burden of establishing the truthfulness and admissibility of the evidence. As statements taken by police officers are likely to be used in future judicial proceedings, records taken with the use of the "e-154" App need to be printed out and signed by the statement-taking officers and the persons from whom the statements are taken, so as to ensure the admissibility of the statements in judicial proceedings.

(3) The "e-154" App involves an annual recurrent expenditure of about HK\$3.3 million. The Police do not maintain other figures mentioned in the question.