

LCQ18: Lion dance permit applications

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee, in the Legislative Council today (October 24):

Question:

Under section 4C of the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap 228), any person who organises or participates in a lion dance, dragon dance or unicorn dance, or any attendant martial arts display (dragon and lion dance sports) in a public place is guilty of an offence, unless the person has been issued with a permit by the Commissioner of Police. Some members of the public have relayed to me that the application procedure for the permit is very cumbersome (e.g. applications must be accompanied by a photocopy of the Hong Kong Identity Card (HKIC) of the organiser as well as each participant and other relevant documents, and applications have to be made at least 14 days prior to the date of the event), which causes inconvenience to the applicants and creates a negative labelling effect that dragon and lion dance sports are undesirable activities, thereby obstructing the popularisation and development of such sports. Regarding the regulation of the dragon and lion dance sports, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of applications for permits received and approved by the Police in the past three years, and the average processing time for each approved application;
- (2) whether it will consider setting up a counter dedicated for permit application in each divisional police station;
- (3) whether it will relax the requirement that applications must be accompanied by a photocopy of HKIC of each participant;
- (4) whether it will consider streamlining the application procedure for permits, accepting applications through electronic means and completing the vetting and approval of the applications within one day after receipt; and
- (5) whether it will relax the regulation of dragon and lion dance sports, with a view to eliminating the negative labelling effect created on the sports; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Section 4C of the Summary Offences Ordinance (Cap 228) stipulates that any person who organises or participates in a lion dance, dragon dance, unicorn dance (hereinafter referred to as lion dance), or any attendant

martial arts display in a public place, save for persons exempted by the Commissioner of Police (CP), shall be subject to the conditions of the permit issued by the CP. The purpose of such a policy is to prevent the involvement of lawbreakers in these activities and to ensure that such activities will not cause public disorder, including traffic congestion, noise nuisance or other inconvenience to the public, or affect public safety. For scrutiny of the applications, the Police require all applicants and participants of such activities to authorise the Police to check their criminal conviction records.

The Police give thorough considerations to each and every application. The Police may grant exemption for appropriate activities having regard to the participants and arrangement of each activity. In case the applicant or participants of an activity are found to have criminal conviction records, the Police shall, taking into account the nature and gravity of their convictions, consider whether the purpose of such activity is to be used to undertake illegal activities. Persons with criminal conviction records are not automatically banned from taking part in these activities. Upon scrutiny, the Police shall reject applications which are considered to be adversely affecting public order or public safety, or suspected to be related to illegal activities.

The reply to the Hon Alice Mak's question is as follows:

(1) As at August 2018, the figures on the applications for lion dance permit received by the Police are as follows:

Year	Number of applications for permits	Number of permits issued	Number of exemptions granted
2015	2 473	2 461	12
2016 (Note 1)	2 340	2 332	7
2017 (Note 2)	2 355	2 349	5
2018 (January to August)	2 124	2 119	5

Note 1: One application was rejected since the location of the activity and the arrangement of the performance would affect traffic safety.

Note 2: The applicant of one application withdrew his application afterwards.

At present, the Police's Performance Pledge sets out that the processing time for lion dance permit applications is 14 days. In case an application is submitted less than 14 days before the activities with reasonable grounds, the Police will also process the application as far as practicable to facilitate the applicant in organising the activity. The Police do not maintain information on the processing time for permit applications.

(2) to (5) Currently, lion dance permit applications are mainly processed by dedicated Licensing Office Sub-Units or Miscellaneous Enquiries Sub-Units of various police districts, depending on the venue of the activity. Applications involving more than one police district or region will be processed by regional formations or the Police Licensing Office respectively.

Unless applications for permits are exempted by the Police, applicants of lion dance permits and participants of such activities must submit information on the activities to the Police and authorise the Police to check their criminal conviction records, so that the Police may assess whether the activities involve lawbreakers and whether they would affect public order or public safety.

The Police regularly review the existing mechanism and continue to maintain close liaison with the sector to refine the application procedures for lion dance permits. To expedite the procedures for approving applications for exemption, since September this year, the Police have extended the power to approve exemptions from the Police Licensing Office to regional and district commanders, and advised the front-line districts and regions to consider approving exemptions for appropriate activities to simplify the application procedures. In addition, the Police are proactively examining the feasibility of allowing submission of lion dance permit applications and uploading of the necessary documents through electronic means, so as to save the time needed for applicants to submit applications in person at police stations. Depending on the progress of system development, the online application system is expected to commence operation in 2020.

It is necessary for the Police to ensure that public order is not disturbed and that public safety is not affected when lion dance activities are conducted in public places. The scrutiny of the information on the activities and participants will help ensure that the relevant activities will not be used by lawbreakers for illegal purposes. There is no intention on the part of the Government to impede the proper development of lion dance activities. Organisers of such activities are required to submit applications to the Police only when their performances are to be held in public places. The Police will consider granting exemptions to facilitate the applicants if they are satisfied that the lion dance activities do not involve any lawbreakers and will not jeopardise public order and public safety.