

LCQ20: Manpower situation of Lifeguards

Following is a question by the Hon Ho Kai-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

It is learnt that as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has, in recent years, encountered difficulties in recruiting non-civil service contract (NCSC) seasonal lifeguards, public swimming pool complexes and beaches have to be partially or completely closed from time to time due to manpower shortage of lifeguards. As such, swimmers cannot use the facilities, and civil service lifeguards have to take up extra duties and work overtime. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of times for which public swimming pool complexes under LCSD were (i) completely and (ii) partially closed in each month of the past three years, with a breakdown by District Council (DC) district, public swimming pool complex and reason for closure;
- (2) of the respective staffing establishments and numbers of vacancies of (a) civil service lifeguards and (b) seasonal lifeguards in the current financial year at the various (i) public swimming pool complexes, (ii) public beaches and (iii) water sports centres, with a breakdown by DC district;
- (3) of the respective target numbers of (i) civil service lifeguards and (ii) seasonal lifeguards to be recruited by LCSD in the current financial year, as well as the respective numbers of such lifeguards recruited so far;
- (4) given that LCSD plans to form a special support team comprising 40 NCSC full-year full-time lifeguards this year for flexible deployment to public swimming pools and beaches in order to cope with unforeseen manpower shortage situations, of the current team size and its deployment records so far;
- (5) given that civil service lifeguards have to take up extra duties and work overtime owing to manpower shortage of seasonal lifeguards, whether the Government has provided civil service lifeguards with extraneous duties allowances and overtime allowances; if not, of the reasons for that;
- (6) whether the Government conducted, in the past three years, surveys on the number of swimmers at and the utilisation of public beaches; if so, of the outcome, and whether it will open the beaches all year round and increase correspondingly lifeguard manpower and the relevant estimates of expenditure; and
- (7) whether it will consider changing the recruitment procedures and relaxing

the entry requirements for lifeguards (e.g. that applicants who have passed a basic swimming and skills test are eligible for provisional employment, and then upon receiving the relevant internal training and obtaining relevant certificates, they may be formally appointed), so as to attract new blood to the trade; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently provides lifeguard services at 44 public swimming pools, 38 gazetted beaches and five water sports centres. The reply to Hon Ho Kai-ming's question is as follows:

(1) LCSD will consider closing the entire swimming pool complex in response to unexpected incidents such as inclement weather, pool water pollution, urgent repair works, unexpected absence of lifeguards, etc. Details on the closure of the entire swimming pool complex for the reasons mentioned above in the past three years are at Annex 1. In daily operation, the service of swimming complexes will also be partially suspended in response to factors such as regular alternate inspections and maintenance, partial failure of facilities, manpower resources of lifeguards, usage pattern of swimmers, possible impact on outdoor facilities due to adverse weather conditions like lightning, thunder, rainstorm and water pollution (such as presence of vomitus). LCSD does not maintain records of detailed statistical figures on partial service suspension of swimming pools. The numbers of days on which public swimming pools were partially closed temporarily due to inadequate lifeguards in the past three years are set out at Annex 2.

(2), (3) and (4) As at April 1, 2019, there are 1 647 full-time lifeguards comprising 174 senior lifeguards and 1 473 lifeguards in LCSD. Of those 1 473 lifeguards, 332 are non-civil service contract (NCSC) full-time seasonal lifeguards. Around 40 part-time hourly-rated seasonal lifeguards were also recruited to augment the lifeguard manpower during the swimming season.

To improve the stability of the lifeguard workforce, LCSD was provided with additional resources for creation of 80 civil service lifeguard posts in 2019-20 to replace 80 seasonal lifeguard posts. The pertinent recruitment exercise has been completed. In addition to recruiting all the 80 newly-created positions, this round of recruitment has also recruited staff to fill around 30 civil service lifeguard vacancies anticipated to arise due to natural wastage this year. New recruits have been assuming duty since April to undergo training and be deployed to perform duties.

Besides, LCSD has also allocated additional resources to launch a pilot scheme in 2019-20, which aims to recruit 40 NCSC full-year full-time lifeguards this year to form a regional "special support team" to alleviate unforeseen manpower shortages in swimming pools and beaches and the work pressure faced by lifeguards on duty. A total of 27 lifeguards were recruited as at April 1, 2019. New appointees have been assuming duty and undergoing training. They will be posted to work in five regions, namely Hong Kong West,

Hong Kong East, Kowloon, New Territories West and New Territories North. The recruitment exercise is ongoing.

Since seasonal lifeguards are employed on a short-term basis, their mobility is higher than that of civil service lifeguards. As at April 1, 2019, 332 seasonal lifeguards were recruited with about 140 vacancies unfilled. The projected total number of seasonal lifeguards required to be recruited for the peak months (i.e. June to August) is around 800. Hence, a series of measures has been adopted by LCSD, including stepping up publicity efforts through different channels, e.g. posting of recruitment advertisements on social media websites, holding recruitment days for seasonal lifeguards at swimming pools in different districts to attract local residents to work as lifeguards, as well as adjusting upward the remuneration in terms of salaries and gratuities for seasonal lifeguards as appropriate to attract more eligible applicants to join the service. In addition, LCSD will continue to recruit part-time hourly-rated seasonal lifeguards.

The staff establishment, staff strength and numbers of vacancies of LCSD's lifeguard posts as at April 1, 2019, with breakdown by District Council districts and types of venues, are at Annex 3.

(5) If civil service lifeguards have to work overtime for operational reasons, the overtime hours will be compensated by time-off as soon as possible by LCSD in accordance with the Civil Service Regulations (the Regulations). Overtime allowance will be paid to officer if granting of time-off cannot be arranged within a reasonable period of time after the officer has undertaken overtime work due to operational needs.

"Extraneous Duties Allowance" (EDA) is one of the categories under "Job-Related Allowances" (JRAs). Under the existing mechanism, departments shall comply with the Regulations and the governing principles of JRAs when considering any proposal in relation to JRAs having regard to the operational needs of the department, inherent duties of individual grade and working conditions of staff, etc. The Regulations also stipulate that JRAs are only payable when the staff are required to perform extra or unusual duties for such duration and frequency as considered appropriate in light of service need and operational efficiency or when the pay structure of the grade/rank concerned is such that the inherent duties cannot be fully reflected in the pay scale. The major responsibilities of civil service lifeguards of LCSD include rescuing drowning swimmers, ensuring the safety of swimmers, maintaining order and keeping beaches/swimming pools clean. LCSD is considering proposals from lifeguard unions in accordance with the Regulations and governing principles, so as to ascertain whether there is sufficient justification to support the granting of EDA to civil service lifeguards.

(6) The annual attendance of gazetted beaches managed by LCSD is about 13 million. However, a number of beaches were severely damaged by typhoon Mangkhut in 2018-19 and temporarily closed, resulting in a drop in the number of visitors to 12.12 million. Statistics about attendance figures of beach are available at LCSD's website

(www.lcsd.gov.hk/en/aboutlcsd/ppr/statistics/leisure.html). LCSD will continue keeping in view the attendance figures of beaches, and will review from time to time the facilities and services of beaches to meet public needs.

(7) The safety of swimmers has been the prime concern for LCSD in arranging the manpower of lifeguards and it is LCSD's requirement that all serving and newly appointed lifeguards shall possess lifeguard awards issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS), which is the only body recognised by the International Life Saving Federation for assessing and awarding lifeguard qualifications in Hong Kong. The entry requirements for NCSC seasonal lifeguards include the possession of a valid Beach Lifeguard Award or Pool Lifeguard Award issued or reassessed by HKLSS within the past three years, while the entry requirements for civil service lifeguards include the possession of a valid Beach Lifeguard Award and Pool Lifeguard Award (i.e. both awards) issued by HKLSS and a valid first aid certificate from the St. John Ambulance Association, Hong Kong Red Cross or Auxiliary Medical Service. All applicants for the posts of civil service lifeguard and NCSC seasonal lifeguard also have to pass the selection interview and trade test of LCSD. These indicate that LCSD's lifeguards have all passed the assessments administered by professional bodies concerned, possessed recognised lifesaving qualifications, and passed the trade test in LCSD's recruitment examination in which they had demonstrated work-related lifesaving skills. LCSD will not consider relaxing the qualification requirements for lifeguards for the time being.