

LCQ21: Mobile applications developed by Government and relevant organisations

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

The Government has been committed to taking forward innovation and technology in recent years. Apart from the provision of a subsidy of as much as \$4.52 million for mobile application (app) developers through the Innovation and Technology Fund for Better Living, various government departments and relevant organisations have also actively launched apps for publicity and information sharing. However, it has been reported that among the 200-odd apps launched by the Government and relevant organisations during the period between 2010 and 2017, 107 apps costing a total of as much as \$23 million of public money have now been decommissioned. At the same time, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, on many occasions, developed apps at high cost for one-off publicity, but some of the apps only had several hundreds of downloads. For instance, an audio guide app launched by the Department in 2016 in support of a project of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum operated for just three months, but cost \$180,000 of public money. Some members of the public have criticised that some apps lack functionality and provide only text information, thus failing to attract members of the public to download, and that the Government's development of such apps is like "pouring money down the drain". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the current total number of apps developed by the Government and relevant organisations which are available for download by members of the public, and set out by name of app (i) the policy bureaux/departments/organisations undertaking the development and (ii) the amount of annual recurrent expenditure incurred;
- (2) whether it has compiled statistics on (i) the monthly number of active users of each of the apps mentioned in (1) and (ii) its percentage in the cumulative number of persons who have downloaded the app; if so, of the figures for the past three years; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it has reviewed the reasons for poor download rates of some apps; of the conditions under and the criteria based on which the authorities determine whether an app should be decommissioned; given that a large number of apps which cost considerable public money to develop have been decommissioned, whether the authorities have evaluated if such situation will affect public confidence in the effective use of public money by policy

bureaux/departments/organisations;

(4) whether the app called "My Kowloon East" (MyKE) which was developed by the Energizing Kowloon East Office satisfies the conditions or criteria for decommissioning mentioned in (3); if so, whether it will immediately decommission the app;

(5) whether the various policy bureaux are currently developing or have plans to develop new apps; if so, of the details; of the criteria for deciding whether to approve the development of an app;

(6) whether the authorities will, prior to approving the development of apps in future, formulate apps development guidelines stipulating that the apps must take into account elements such as "user experience", "user-centricity" and practicality, with a view to ensuring that such apps have high download and usage rates; and

(7) whether the authorities have specified in the contracts awarded to app developers that the developers are required to pay compensations to the authorities in the event that the apps have not been successfully developed, have not been launched on schedule or have varied greatly in quality, so as to ensure proper use of public money?

Reply:

After consulting the relevant policy bureaux / government departments (B/Ds), the reply for each part of the question is provided as follows:

(1) & (2) As of end April 2019, B/Ds provided a total of 85 mobile applications (apps) for download by the public. The annual recurrent expenditure and total number of downloads of these mobile apps are set out at Annex A. Individual B/Ds will, from time to time, collect data on the number of monthly active users and the total number of downloads. The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) does not maintain information in this regard.

In addition, relevant government organisations provide a total of 52 mobile apps for download (Annex B). The OGCIO do not have statistics on their annual recurrent expenditure, the number of active users and the total number of downloads.

(3) There are various reasons behind whether the number of downloads of a mobile app is high or low, for example, the target user group can be small in size (such as mobile apps for the visually impaired or overseas investors), or the public can obtain services through other channels (such as departmental websites, etc.). In deciding whether their mobile app should be decommissioned, B/Ds will consider factors such as its download rate, user feedback on the app, whether the mobile app has an on going demand, whether the user needs should be met by other mobile apps or e-government websites. In the past two years, B/Ds have decommissioned some outdated mobile apps to save the maintenance expenditures involved.

(4) According to information provided by the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Energizing Kowloon East Office (EKEO) of DEVB launched the "My Kowloon East" mobile app to provide a platform for sharing real-time data to promote smart city development. These real-time data include vacant hourly parking spaces and real-time data collected from the testing of various proof-of-concept projects. As of end April 2019, the total number of downloads of this mobile app was around 9 600, which may be related to its focused application for the Kowloon East area while its number of downloads surged by 25% in 2018-19. EKEO will continue to review the app regularly, improve its design and functionality in response to user needs, and further promote its new features to encourage the public to download and use it.

(5) The Water Supplies Department (WSD) and OGCI0 plan to develop new mobile apps in 2019-20. Details are as follows:

(a) The WSD plans to launch the "H2OPE Centre" mobile app in the second quarter of 2019. The H2OPE Centre is a new educational activity centre set up by the WSD. The centre will highlight through various interactive games and exhibits educational messages about water resources in Hong Kong as well as saving and conserving water. The mobile app will support the establishment of the H2OPE Centre by providing booking and guided tour functions to facilitate visitors to participate in the Centre's activities.

(b) To tie in with the implementation of "Electronic Identity" (eID), the OGCI0 will launch the eID mobile app in mid-2020 to enable Hong Kong residents to register eID via personal mobile devices. After successful registration, users can use the eID mobile app for identity authentication and conducting online transactions with the Government and commercial organisations.

(6) The amended "Practice Guide for Developing Mobile Apps" published by the OGCI0 in November 2018 stipulates that B/Ds are required to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of the mobile app; set the objectives and understand the needs of target user groups before developing an app. They are also required to conduct appropriate publicity to enable target users to understand the objectives and usage of the app. In addition, the OGCI0 will regularly review the development of mobile apps by B/Ds and, subject to the nature and target user groups of these mobile apps, request B/Ds to consider decommissioning the mobile apps that have been launched for some time but recorded fewer than 10 000 downloads.

(7) B/Ds will set out the service scope, system and app requirements (including functional and security requirements) and the project schedule when awarding contracts for the development of mobile apps. The concerned B/D will also perform testing and acceptance. If the implementation of the project cannot meet the contract requirements, the Government will handle it according to the contract terms, including claims for compensation, etc.