

LCQ5: Prevention of incidents of cruelty to animals

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Priscilla Leung and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (June 13):

Question:

Last year, this Council passed a motion on "Safeguarding animal rights", urging the Government to adopt 26 measures to safeguard animal rights. Moreover, since April this year, dedicated investigation teams have been set up, in the 22 Police districts across the territory which have criminal investigation teams, to handle animal cruelty cases. However, a number of appalling incidents of cruelty to animals still happened in recent months. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as the Secretary for Food and Health indicated last month that the law would be amended to introduce a concept of positive duty of care of animals on animal keepers, of the details of the proposal and the legislative timetable; whether it will comprehensively review the penalties under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance in order to enhance the deterrent effect;

(2) whether the dedicated investigation teams under the Police have strengthened the exchange with each other of the experience in investigating cases of cruelty to animals, and established a close communication and cooperation mechanism with the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong) and concern groups on animal interests; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider allocating additional resources to implement an animal caring community ambassador programme to raise public awareness of caring for animals and offer all-round support for animal keepers, so as to reduce the occurrence of incidents of cruelty to animals?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to protecting animal welfare and implements a series of measures in this regard. Apart from prohibiting and punishing acts of animal cruelty, efforts in public education are being increasingly stepped up.

Having consulted the Security Bureau, my reply to various parts of the question raised by Dr Hon Priscilla Leung is as follows:

(1) We are reviewing the existing legislation relating to animal welfare, including exploring the introduction of a concept of positive duty of care on animal keepers, i.e. requiring animal keepers to take all necessary measures to protect the welfare of their animals, such as providing proper care and sufficient space for their animals and preventing them from disease, injury or suffering, etc by taking necessary measures. Having regard to overseas experience and opinions of animal welfare organisations (AWOs) and other stakeholders, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) will exchange views with the stakeholders in relation to the preliminary proposals in the second half of this year, with a view to consulting the public in 2019. Although the maximum penalty under the existing Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) is higher than that of other developed places, we will also take this opportunity to re-examine the penalty level under the Ordinance.

(2) In 2011, the Police, together with AFCD, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), veterinary associations and concern groups, introduced the Animal Watch Scheme (Scheme) to combat and handle animal cruelty cases more effectively through a four-pronged approach, covering education and training, publicity, intelligence gathering and investigation. The Scheme reinforces collaboration among various stakeholders and strengthens Police's efforts in the investigation of animal cruelty cases. The College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences of the City University of Hong Kong joined the Scheme in 2017.

On training, officers from AFCD and SPCA enlighten the multi-agency approach for the investigation of animal cruelty cases to police officers participating in foundation training and criminal investigation courses. AFCD also provides animal welfare training for officers of the dedicated investigation teams set up by the Police in 22 police districts across the territory to strengthen their efforts in combating animal cruelty cases. The investigation teams of various districts also share their experience on a common platform.

On intelligence gathering, the Scheme encourages SPCA, veterinarians, animal concern groups and members of the public to report any persons or activities suspected to be involved in animal cruelty. Individual police districts maintain close communication with the animal concern groups in their respective districts, with a view to stepping up intelligence gathering efforts and following up on cases. On investigation, the Police, AFCD and SPCA have established a cooperation mechanism, whereby officers from AFCD and SPCA will provide professional advice and assist in the investigation at the scene of suspected animal cruelty cases where necessary.

(3) As for the Member's proposal to allocate additional resources to raise public awareness of caring for animals, such as by implementing an animal caring community ambassador programme, we agree with the importance of enhancing the work in this regard. On publicity and education, a dedicated team was set up by AFCD in 2011 to disseminate messages of caring for animals and responsible pet ownership through various activities, including dog

adoption carnivals, pet adoption days, dog training programmes, and school and estate seminars, etc. Each year AFCD invites artists to promote the animal adoption carnivals and pet adoption days. Announcements in the public interest are also produced and broadcast on buses and online platforms to raise the public awareness of caring for animals. AFCD also invited famous artists as the ambassadors of the pet adoption day held last weekend. The event had successfully attracted around 16,000 participants and contributed positively in encouraging the public to consider animal adoption.

Furthermore, the Police promote the Scheme to members of the public through various channels to convey the message of prevention of animal cruelty, and enlist community support to enhance public awareness in this respect. At the same time, AFCD has been working closely with, and providing financial support to, AWOs for carrying out work in this regard.

Support from society at large is essential to enhancing animal welfare. We will continue the work on this front with relevant departments, and look forward to receiving Members' support for our work on reviewing the legislation relating to animal welfare.