

LCQ6: Assisting arts groups affected by demonstrations

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (November 6):

Question:

The Performing Industry Association (Hong Kong) and quite a number of arts groups have relayed to me that in recent months, a number of cultural and arts activities have been cancelled or rescheduled due to demonstrations involving violence. The reasons for the arts groups to make such decisions include early closure of venues under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and traffic disruption. The arts groups concerned not only have suffered loss of box office income, but also have to deploy manpower and financial resources to handle follow-up work such as ticket refund. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows, since June this year, the number of cultural and arts activities that were cancelled or rescheduled due to demonstrations involving violence; whether LCSD has provided assistance to the affected arts groups, such as priority allocation of venues and waiver of venue hire charges; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that LCSD has adopted different practices for venues in the same district (i.e. some venues were closed early while the others stayed open), and that there were still activities going on in some venues which had been closed early, whether LCSD has formulated a policy on early closure of venues; if so, of the details (including the factors to be considered and their weightings), and whether LCSD will make public such policy; if LCSD has not formulated such policy, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will introduce measures to assist the cultural and arts sector in tackling financial difficulties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) Of the cultural and arts activities held from June to November 3 in performance venues under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), about 84 activities were cancelled, 19 activities were rescheduled due to closure of venues, and 79 activities were cancelled or rescheduled of the organisers' own accord. For activities which were cancelled due to closure of performance venues, the LCSD will arrange the affected arts groups to hold the events or activities on other dates with its best endeavours, and allow

hire charges paid to be transferred for the rescheduled dates. If rescheduling is impossible due to the schedule of the affected arts groups or unavailability of venues, the LCSD will arrange for refund of hire charges and related fees paid. The LCSD will announce the rescheduling or cancellation of events and refund arrangements on the webpages of the respective venues to help organisers to disseminate relevant information to the public.

(2) The LCSD will, as far as possible, adhere to the principle of maintaining normal service for venue users and the premise of addressing the safety of users and staff when considering whether a venue should be closed. Factors to be considered include public safety assessment by the Police, public transportation on the event date and the actual environment of the venue concerned. The LCSD will also make reference to the arrangement of government departments and other organisations in the vicinity, as well as the relevant arrangement of the organiser in relation to the event concerned or the rental period (such as whether open activities or non-open rehearsals, installation or dismantling of the stage are arranged during the rental period, the number and types of participants, whether the activities can be postponed or rerun, and so on). Individual venues have relevant contingency guidelines and plans. Venue staff will liaise closely with the organisers to make timely decisions and inform the public as soon as possible through press releases and webpages.

(3) The current-term Government attaches great importance to culture and arts. In the past two years, the Government has increased the subvention for the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, nine major performing arts groups, Hong Kong Arts Festival Society and LCSD's Venue Partners by a total of \$125 million. In response to the increasingly challenging economic environment, the Financial Secretary has earlier announced a new round of relief measures. One of the measures is to provide hirers of facilities of civic centres managed by the LCSD with a 50 per cent reduction of hire charges for a period of six months from October 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020 to support artists and cultural organisations to hold various cultural and arts activities continuously. The concession applies to 146 facilities, including performance venues, rehearsal rooms, lecture theatres and exhibition halls. Hirers paying normal rates and concessionary rates (e.g. non-profit-making organisations) are eligible for the concession. The beneficiaries include artists and cultural organisations of various scales.

Furthermore, as the current situation brings pressure to the operation of art groups, the Government will also introduce one-off relaxation to the matching parameters of this year's Art Development Matching Grants Scheme, including the increase of matching ratio for eligible arts groups and their respective matching grant ceiling. It is hoped that such relaxation will help to alleviate the pressure of art groups in soliciting sufficient donations or sponsorships and minimise their losses as a result of reduced donations or sponsorships and box office income. Arts groups of various scales will benefit from this measure.