

LCQ8: Assistance for sectors of sports, performing arts, culture and publication

Following is a question by the Hon Ma Fung-kwok and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Caspar Tsui, in the Legislative Council today (June 24):

A number of representatives from the sports, performing arts, culture and publication sectors have relayed to me that the operation of quite a number of organisations in their sectors has been hard hit by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic. The unemployment rate of the "arts, entertainment and recreation industry" from February to April this year rose sharply to 9 per cent. Although the Government has launched two rounds of relief initiatives and measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF), many organisations and practitioners of the aforesaid sectors have indicated that they have not benefited from them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the implementation of the following initiatives and measures implemented under AEF, including the respective numbers of applications received and approved, and the amounts granted:

(i) the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme,
(ii) one-off relief grant for school instructors of learning/interest classes,
(iii) one-off grant for registered sports coaches,
(iv) relief grants for freelance workers hired by subvented non-governmental welfare organisations to provide training and coaching for service users,
(v) relief for creative industries, and
(vi) subsidy schemes for premises affected by COVID-19, including the Amusement Game Centres Subsidy Scheme, the Fitness Centre Subsidy Scheme, the Places of Amusement Licence Holders Subsidy Scheme, the Places of Public Entertainment Licence Holder Subsidy Scheme, and the Sports and Recreational Sites Subsidy Scheme;

(2) whether it will consider providing further support for members of the aforesaid sectors (especially those organisations and practitioners that have not benefited from the initiatives and measures mentioned in (1)); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the factors that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) takes into consideration when deciding whether to reopen a certain cultural and leisure facility; whether LCSD will, having regard to the latest situation of the epidemic, draw up a timetable for reopening those venues which have yet been reopened; the anti-epidemic measures adopted by LCSD for the reopened venues; whether those measures will be adjusted in the light of

the latest situation of the epidemic, and the relevant considerations;

(4) whether LCSD has consulted the relevant sectors on the dates for reopening the various cultural and leisure facilities as well as the epidemic prevention arrangements for the venues; as the persons-in-charge of some arts groups have pointed out that their ticket office receipts will be severely affected in the event that LCSD imposes, for epidemic prevention reasons, restrictions on the attendances at the reopened performance venues, of the assistance to be provided by the Government for the affected arts groups;

(5) whether it has consulted the relevant sectors in order to formulate strategies to help them recover as early as possible when the epidemic is over; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it will consider issuing to members of the public consumption vouchers for cultural, recreational and sports activities so as to encourage them to participate in such activities when the epidemic is over, and at the same time enable the relevant sectors to recover as early as possible; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) The implementation details of various schemes and measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF), with information provided by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), Commercial and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB), Education Bureau, Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and Social Welfare Department, are set out at Annex.

(2) When formulating the specific schemes under the two rounds of AEF and relief initiatives in the Budget, the Government has endeavoured to balance the interests of various sectors and the general public as far as possible. We hope that these measures can help address the imminent needs of enterprises and individuals concerned. The Government will keep in view the development of the epidemic and respond swiftly.

(3) In the light of the response level under the Preparedness and Response Plan for Novel Infectious Disease of Public Health Significance being raised to Emergency Response Level and to avoid gathering of people, all fee-charging recreation and sports facilities (including sports centres, tennis courts, turf pitches, public swimming pools, etc.) of LCSD were temporarily closed starting from January 29, 2020. Subsequently, some outdoor leisure facilities and indoor leisure facilities were reopened on March 3 and 11 respectively. These facilities, however, were temporarily closed again from March 23 taking into account the latest development of the epidemic. Non-fee charging outdoor facilities such as soccer pitches, basketball courts, children's play facilities and so on were also temporarily closed starting from March 28.

Some land-based leisure facilities such as running tracks in sports

grounds (for jogging only), tennis courts, bowling greens, badminton courts, squash courts, table tennis rooms/tables, dance rooms/activity rooms, fitness rooms, sports climbing facilities, billiard/American pool tables, etc. were reopened on May 6, 11 and 21 in view of the latest situation of the epidemic. Special measures are adopted at the reopened leisure facilities, including enhanced cleaning, temperature checks for all visitors entering indoor venues, limiting the number of facility users and temporary closure of spectator stands so as to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

Apart from the land-based facilities, public swimming pools and gazetted beaches managed by LCSD were reopened on May 21 and 23 respectively. In addition to stringent monitoring of the disinfection procedures of pool water and pool water quality at the reopened swimming pools, a number of special measures are adopted, which include:

- reopening some swimming pool facilities only, such as main pools, secondary pools, training pools or teaching pools, etc.;
- temporarily limiting the number of users in swimming pools to maintain distance among swimmers;
- arranging body temperature screening for all people entering swimming pools. Those with fever or symptoms of respiratory infections will not be allowed to enter the swimming pools; opening alternate shower cubicles and shower heads to ensure appropriate distance between users of shower facilities; and
- advising the public to wear their own masks before and after swimming, as well as when lining up to enter the swimming pools.

In the light of the latest situation of the epidemic, LCSD reopened the following non-fee charging facilities from June 20, including outdoor soccer pitches, cricket grounds, basketball courts, volleyball courts, handball courts, netball courts, roller hockey courts and gateball courts. The following fee-charging team games facilities also reopened from June 22, including turf soccer pitches, baseball courts, rugby pitches, cricket grounds, hockey grounds, basketball courts, volleyball courts, handball courts, as well as the Sanshou Training Hall at Lei Yue Mun Sports Centre and the contact sports centre at Pei Ho Street Sports Centre. Besides, outdoor children's play facilities and road safety towns were also reopened on June 22.

As for cultural venues, all museums and most of the libraries have reopened most their facilities (except the child facilities) with special opening arrangements. The major facilities of the 16 performance venues under LCSD, such as concert halls, theatres, auditoriums, cultural activities halls and arenas have been opened for performances or activities with live audience from June 19. Taking into account the anti-epidemic needs, the following measures are implemented:

- limiting the number of audience in the facilities to not more than half

- of the original seating capacity;
- limiting consecutive seats to not more than 16 and arranging seating on alternate rows, where practicable, for the purpose of social distancing;
- ensuring that singers and wind instrument players must maintain a distance of at least two metres or be separated by some form of partition which can serve as an effective buffer between each of them and other performers in front of them; and
- carrying out cleaning and disinfection after each performance or activity.

For activities to be held in minor facilities such as rehearsal rooms, music/dance studios and lecture/function/conference rooms, each cluster should have less than 16 participants or audience and must maintain an appropriate social distance. The number of users in minor facilities will be limited to half of the original capacity in general. To avoid people gathering, no ceremony will be allowed in the exhibition facilities with the number of participants restricted. Children under 12 will only be allowed to enter the exhibition facilities when accompanied by an adult. All venue users should wear their own mask throughout their stay at the facilities and must go through temperature screening when entering the venue. Those with fever or symptoms of respiratory infections will be prohibited from entering the venues. All users must also maintain an appropriate social distance in common areas.

(4) LCSD has taken into account the latest social distancing policy of the Government and sought the professional advice of health authority in adjusting the reopening arrangements. LCSD will continue to monitor the latest development of COVID-19 closely and review the progressive reopening arrangements for facilities. LCSD will closely liaise and follow up with the hirer organisations affected by the epidemic on the hire charges for rescheduling or cancellation of events and ticket refund arrangements.

(5) The Government has implemented a series of relief measures since October 2019, which included the reduction of basic hire charges of civic centres' facilities managed by LCSD by 50 per cent for booking from October 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020. In view of the development of the epidemic, the cultural venues were closed and many artists, arts groups and hirers had cancelled their arts, cultural and entertainment performances and activities. The Government has further announced to extend the reduction of basic hire charges of facilities of civic centres managed by LCSD and increase the concession rate from 50 per cent to 75 per cent to September 30, 2020.

To further support the recovery of the performing industry and to encourage relaunching of large scale cultural and entertainment performances after the pandemic, LCSD reduces the hire charge based on percentage of gross ticket proceeds from 20 per cent to 10 per cent applicable to four performance venues, including the Hong Kong Coliseum, Queen Elizabeth Stadium, Hong Kong Cultural Centre and Hong Kong City Hall for a period of two years.

Before HAB rolled out the Arts and Culture Sector Subsidy Scheme under the AEF, we had maintained communication with different stakeholders in the sector, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and relevant Legislative Councillors to ensure that the support measures would meet the needs of the affected parties.

For "M" Mark events affected by the epidemic, HAB has liaised with the national sports associations concerned to understand the expenditures involved, and decided to alleviate the financial burden of the relevant national sports associations with a special direct grant. We will, based on the reasonable expenditure (such as venue charges paid and publicity expenses) actually incurred for the event concerned, calculate the subsidy amount, which will be capped at \$2 million for each event.

CEDB also announced in end-February 2020 to launch under the Film Development Fund an array of new and enhancement measures to boost local productions and promote employment, and to increase subsidy for professional training to add value to the trade.

The Government will continue to liaise with relevant institutions and organisations in the sector to understand their views on how to assist the revitalisation of the sector after the epidemic.

(6) The Government noted the suggestion of "consumption vouchers for cultural, recreational and sports activities". When considering measures to support the revitalisation of the sector, the Government will take into account the effectiveness of the measures, the financial implication, as well as the views of the sector. We will continue to liaise with the sector to ensure that the measures introduced can benefit the sector.