

LCQ8: Sponsored Visitors Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Claudia Mo and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (May 23):

Question:

The Government regularly invites, under the Sponsored Visitors Programme, political leaders as well as prominent members of the political and business sectors from various countries all over the world to visit Hong Kong. Last month, the Government invited the retired Chairman of the Law Committee of the 12th National People's Congress to visit Hong Kong under the Programme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the time when the Government decided to invite the retired official to Hong Kong; the details of his visit to Hong Kong (including the major activities during the visit and the amounts of public expenditure on various items); the standard of the hospitality provided;

(2) of the following details of the visits to Hong Kong arranged by the Government under the Sponsored Visitors Programme in each of the past five financial years: (i) dates of visits to Hong Kong, (ii) names of visitors, (iii) main purposes and other details of the visits to Hong Kong, and (iv) amounts of public expenditures (set out in tables of the same format as the table below);

Financial year: _____

(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)

(3) of the total expenditure incurred by the Sponsored Visitors Programme in the past five financial years and the estimated expenditure for the current financial year;

(4) whether the Government has formulated standards of hospitality for receiving visitors under the Sponsored Visitors Programme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of the principles based on which the Government determines the persons to be invited to visit Hong Kong; if there is no such principles, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government runs a Sponsored Visitors Programme to invite key opinion-formers outside Hong Kong (including government officials, political and business personalities, think-tank members, opinion leaders and academics, etc) to visit Hong Kong to gain some experience at first hand and to understand our latest developments.

The reply to the Hon Claudia Mo's question is as follows:

When drawing up the guest invitations under the Sponsored Visitors Programme, the Government mainly takes into consideration the expertise and influence of the proposed visitors in their respective sectors or fields, as well as the Government's major policy focuses. We will arrange meetings and visits to introduce the invited guests to the latest developments of Hong Kong in key areas such as economic and urban construction. Specific visit programmes are refined according to the background and interests of the invited guests. The standard level of hospitality for the invited guests includes business class return airfare, accommodation in a five-star hotel, in-town transportation, and accountable non-cash allowance to cover guests' expenses such as meals at the hotel, etc.

The expenditure on the Sponsored Visitors Programme over the past five years is as follows: 110 guests for 2013-14 with an expenditure of \$5.73 million; 115 guests for 2014-15 with an expenditure of \$6.97 million; 159 guests for 2015-16 with an expenditure of \$9.28 million; 96 guests for 2016-17 with an expenditure of \$5.96 million; and 91 guests for 2017-18 with an expenditure of \$4.70 million. The estimated number of sponsored visitors in 2018-19 is around 110 with an expenditure estimated to be around \$7 million. The above expenditure mainly covers costs for air fares/transport to and from Hong Kong, in-town transportation, and accommodation, etc.

Upon the invitation of the Government, Mr Qiao Xiaoyang, Chairman of the Law Committee of the 12th National People's Congress, visited Hong Kong in April this year under the Sponsored Visitors Programme. During the visit, Mr Qiao attended a seminar for government officials as a guest speaker and met with a number of senior government officials. He also visited a number of major infrastructure projects in Hong Kong to understand more about the latest developments of Hong Kong.