

LCQ8: Supply of sports venues

Following is a question by the Hon Ngan Man-yu and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Jack Chan, in the Legislative Council today (May 25):

Question:

It has been reported that as the supply of sports venues under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) falls short of demand and such venues are often fully booked, some hirers tout their booked sessions for using the LCSD's sports venues for profit (touting activities). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the LCSD's prevailing measures for combating touting activities, of the following information in each of the past three years:

(i) the number of cases in which the LCSD refused the use of the facility by a hirer because the information on the identity document produced by the hirer upon check-in was inconsistent with the booking record or irregularities were identified, as well as the number of complaints received as a result;

(ii) the number of cases in which the LCSD suspended a hirer's eligibility to book its facilities for 180 days because the hirer had been found to have engaged in unauthorised transfer of the user permit, as well as the number of complaints received as a result; and

(iii) the number of complaints about touting activities received by the LCSD, and the number of such complaints it investigated and followed up;

(2) given that the LCSD has, since the 1st of this month, implemented a new measure to combat touting activities (i.e. arranging for random inspections by its staff during the booked sessions to see if the hirer is present to use the facility), (i) whether there are on-site staff on duty at all the sports venues under the LCSD at present, and (ii) whether the LCSD has sufficient staff on site to conduct random inspections; if so, of the details of the manpower arrangements; if not, whether LCSD will increase its manpower;

(3) whether the LCSD has studied the reasons why its sports venues are often fully booked, and of the solutions for that; and

(4) whether it will take the following measures to alleviate the situation of the supply of sports venues falling short of demand:

(i) review the standards for the provision of sports facilities in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, as well as increase the ratio of sports facilities to population;

(ii) introduce "recreation and sports vouchers" to subsidise members of the public to hire sports venues run by the private sector;

(iii) use some community halls' facilities as temporary sports venues; and

(iv) arrange for schools to open their ball courts for hire by members of the public during non-school hours; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Ngan Man-yu is as follows:

(1) In recent years, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has adopted a multi-pronged approach comprising an improved booking system, a penalty mechanism and stepped-up inspection to combat touting activities. The department imposes penalties on individuals who fail to show up or breach the regulations. Two no-show records within 30 days will incur suspension of a person's rights to book the sports facilities for 90 days. If a hirer is found to have engaged in unauthorised transfer of user permit, his/her booking right for sports facilities will be suspended for 180 days.

As required under the Conditions of Use of LCSD Recreation and Sports Facilities (Conditions of Use), hirers must produce valid user permits with their identity documents for verification by on-site staff before using the facilities. If the identity document provided by the hirer is inconsistent with the department's booking record, his/her right to use the facility will be rejected by the LCSD immediately. Failure of a hirer to take up the booked session according to the relevant requirements and the aforesaid procedures will be counted as one no-show record. Two no-show records within 30 consecutive days will incur suspension of a person's rights to book the LCSD's fee-charging recreation and sports facilities for 90 days. In the past three years, there were more than 137 000 cases involving refused use of the relevant facilities due to the hirer's failure to take up the booked sessions in person or discrepancy between the identity document provided by user and that on the booking record. Among them, more than 8 000 members of the public with two no-show records had their booking rights for the LCSD's fee-charging recreation and sports facilities suspended for 90 days. Moreover, two hirers had their booking rights for sports facilities suspended for 180 days due to their engagement in unauthorised transfer of user permit. The number of relevant cases is at Annex I.

To take appropriate follow-up actions against touting activities, the LCSD will, upon receipt of complaints, conduct investigation and take follow-up actions as appropriate, including conducting surprise inspections during the booked sessions, requiring the hirer to provide his/her identity document for checking again, etc. If any irregularities are identified, offenders will be penalised in accordance with the related penalties. In the past three years, the LCSD received 900 complaints about touting activities and

conducted investigation and follow-up actions accordingly under the aforesaid mechanism. The number of relevant complaints is at Annex II.

(2) To further combat touting activities, the LCSD has implemented a new measure starting from May 1, 2022. In accordance with the provisions of the Conditions of Use, the hirer must be present during the use of the booked sessions. Random inspections will be conducted by venue staff during the booked sessions. If the hirer is not present during the use of the facilities, it will result in one count of breach of Conditions of Use by the hirer. Any two counts of breach within 30 consecutive days will result in suspension of the relevant person's rights to book the fee-charging recreation and sports facilities of the LCSD for 90 days. As at May 20, 2022, there were more than 200 occasions where hirers were found not present at the venues and 10 of them with two no-show records had their booking rights for venues suspended for 90 days. The new measure is currently enforced by more than 350 on-site staff at the relevant LCSD venues. There is no need to deploy additional manpower at this stage.

(3) In view of the first phase of the relaxation of social distancing measures, the LCSD reopened 61 out of a total of 103 sports centres (i.e. about 60 per cent) under its management on April 21, 2022. As some of the sports centres were still being used for anti-epidemic purposes at that time, there were fewer venues available for public use, leading to a tight supply of facilities. With the easing of the epidemic situation, relevant bureaux and departments have returned some of the sports centres to the LCSD. It is expected that by mid-June, about 20 sports centres will be reopened and about 80 per cent of the sports centres will be available for public use. This will help alleviate the prevailing tight supply situation.

Besides, following the population growth and the increasing number of people participating in sports activities, the Government announced in the Policy Address in January 2017 the Five-year Plan for Sports and Recreational Facilities (the Five-year Plan) to develop new or improve existing sports and recreation facilities. Through implementing the Five-year Plan, we have made continuous efforts to increase and improve sports facilities and open spaces, with a view to encouraging members of the public to exercise regularly and improving the quality of living, providing additional venues for training by national sports associations (NSAs) and athletes, and facilitating the diversification of sports development. Four sports centres, namely Tsuen Wan Sports Centre, Siu Lun Sports Centre, Che Kung Temple Sports Centre and Choi Wing Road Sports Centre, have been completed and commissioned since 2018. Furthermore, Sham Shui Po Sports Centre is expected to be commissioned in the third quarter of 2022. The LCSD will provide more sports facilities for public use in future.

(4) (i) The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) reported to the Panel on Home Affairs of the Legislative Council on September 27, 2021 on the Consultancy Study on Provision of Sports Facilities in Hong Kong conducted by the consultants. The consultants conducted a telephone survey to collect the latest preferences of the general public on sports activities and provided recommendations on the planning of community sports facilities for them. Besides, the consultants

surveyed the need of various stakeholders such as the NSAs on their demand and usage of the current sports facilities, thereby worked out the number of additional territorial and regional sports facilities required in five and 10 years' time to cater for athletes' training and competition needs so identified. The consultants recommended formulating a facility hierarchy, devising new population-based provision standards for core sports facilities for community usage as well as introducing a new methodology to assess provision levels for sports facilities, etc. Taking into account of the consultants' overall recommendation, revision to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines will be prepared as necessary.

(ii) Heavily subsidised by the Government, the hire charges of the sports facilities provided by the LCSD are low and have always been maintained at a level affordable to the general public. The LCSD also offers concessionary rates for designated persons (namely the elderly, full-time students, people under the age of 14, and persons with disabilities together with their carers). Apart from the sports facilities provided by the LCSD, other organisations including schools, non-profit making sports organisations and public housing estates provide different sports facilities. Currently, some non-profit making sports organisations such as NSAs and district sports associations have opened up their sports facilities to the public with hire charges comparable to that of similar public sports facilities. Therefore, we do not have plan to introduce "recreation and sports vouchers" to subsidise members of the public to hire sports facilities run by the private sector at this moment.

(iii) The community halls and community centres of the Home Affairs Department provide local organisations with venues for holding various community building/involvement activities, including recreational, cultural and sports related events or training courses, etc, and have already been hired from time to time for use as temporary sports venues for holding sports related events or training courses.

(iv) To encourage schools to open up their facilities for sports use, the HAB and Education Bureau (EDB) jointly launched the Opening up School Facilities for Promotion of Sports Development Scheme (the Scheme) in 2017/18 school year. Schools are encouraged, through financial incentives under the Scheme, to open up their facilities such as school halls, activity rooms, playgrounds, sports grounds and classrooms, for use by NSAs and their affiliated members, district sports associations, sports organisations subvented by the LCSD and other eligible non-profit organisations, to hold sports programmes during non-school hours. Participating schools may levy hire charges as provided under the prevailing guidelines issued by the EDB. They will also receive an additional subsidy from the HAB and the EDB to cover expenses incurred in opening up school facilities and to replace or acquire items required for sports programmes. The Scheme has been well received by the sports sector and schools since its launch. Details of participation in the Scheme since 2017/18 school year are as follows:

School Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*	2020/21*
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Number of participating schools	134	136	132	126
Number of schools paired with sports organisations	12	27	48	45
Number of sports organisations paired up with schools	15	20	28	33
Number of programmes	38	162	123	168
Number of attendances	1 333	3 392	5 207	5 705

*Schools were suspended most of the time in 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years to avoid social contact and reduce the risk of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sports programmes originally planned to be held in schools were thus affected.