

LCQ9: General Chinese Charities Fund and Emergency Relief Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Kwong Chun-yu and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Lau Kong-wah, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

Persons who have been affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs may apply to the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) or the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF) for financial assistance. Some victims affected by last year's super typhoon Mangkhut have relayed to me that after the passage of the typhoon, the District Offices (DOs) of their respective districts did not deploy staff to publicise to them that they might apply to the two Funds for assistance, and the victims became aware of it only through word of mouth. Moreover, although the victims' accommodation suffered damage to varying extent, the amount of relief granted to them under GCCF was \$3,000 across the board. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the locations and manner in which the Government carried out publicity activities on the two Funds at the district level in the past three years; the channels and procedures for application for the two Funds, and the documents which applicants are required to submit;

(2) in respect of each of the two Funds, of the respective numbers of applications from Mangkhut-affected victims, which were received, approved and rejected by the Government, the average time taken for the vetting and approval of such applications, and the total amount of relief grants approved; the reasons for some applications being rejected;

(3) of the considerations and criteria based on which DOs in the various districts assess, for determining the amount of relief grant, the financial hardship faced by the applicants applying for assistance under GCCF; whether those considerations and criteria include the extent of damage to the applicants' accommodation; if not, whether the home visit procedure can be dispensed with in order to expedite the payment of grants;

(4) of the date on which the Home Affairs Department last adjusted the ceiling of relief grant under GCCF and the criteria adopted for that; whether the Government will review and raise that ceiling; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of (i) the total amount of donations received from members of the public and (ii) the total amount of grants approved, by the Government in respect of ERF in the past five years?

Reply:

President,

The reply (prepared in consultation with the Labour and Welfare Bureau and other relevant departments) to the Hon Kwong Chun-yu's question is as follows:

(1) General Chinese Charities Fund

The objective of the General Chinese Charities Fund (GCCF) is to provide emergency relief to Hong Kong residents who are affected by natural disasters or accidents and have financial needs. District Offices (DOs) of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) would disseminate information about the GCCF to people affected after the occurrence of natural disasters or accidents, including assisting residents in completing and submitting the GCCF application forms. Some DOs have posted notices or publicised the funds in collaboration with district organisations. People affected can submit the applications for relief grant under GCCF to respective DOs. DOs have to vet each and every GCCF application. Depending on the circumstances of individual application, DOs may request relevant information, e.g. identification document, income proof, etc. for assessing the financial hardship of the applicants and determining the level of relief grant.

Emergency Relief Fund

The Emergency Relief Fund Ordinance, Chapter 1103 of the Laws of Hong Kong, provides for the establishment and administration of a trust fund known as the Emergency Relief Fund (ERF). The ERF is vested in the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated as Trustee. It aims to provide financial assistance for persons who are in need of urgent relief as a result of fire, flooding, tempest, landslide, typhoon or other natural disasters. Grants from the ERF are intended for relief rather than compensation. The responsibility for approving grants and making payments is, in most cases, vested in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), the Marine Department (MD), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Lands Department (LandsD), while the HAD is responsible for overall co-ordination at the district level. There are five types of grants under the ERF:

	Type of grants	Operating department
A	Grants in respect of death or personal injury	SWD
B	Domestic re-accommodation, re-equipment, site formation and repair grants and grant for severe damage to home appliances	LandsD In the case of dwelling vessels, investigation and verification by MD and payment by LandsD

C	Grants to repair or replace vessels and fishing gear	MD for working boats and dwelling vessels AFCD for fishing boats and gear
D	Primary producer grants 1. Stock houses and farm buildings destroyed or severely damaged 2. Rehabilitation grants for loss of crops, livestock or cultured fish	LandsD AFCD
E	Special grants	Operating department(s) concerned

On the ERF, the publicity means and efforts by respective operating departments in the districts in the past three years, as well as the means, procedures and documents required for application for the ERF are at Annex 1.

(2) The number of applications received, approved, rejected/withdrawn, reasons for rejected applications and the total amount of payments approved under the two funds after the onslaught of super typhoon Mangkhut in Hong Kong are at Annex 2.

DOs have to process each and every GCCF application. As the nature and circumstances vary from case to case of individual application, there is no standard processing time.

For ERF, the operating departments do not have statistics on the average time taken for processing such applications. In general, the processing time of applications for each type of grants under the ERF is set out at Annex 3. All operating departments had vetted applications within the designated timeframe.

(3) When processing GCCF applications, DOs will take into account the nature and circumstances of individual application, e.g. financial situation of the applicant, and whether the applicant has obtained another source of aid, etc., to assess the financial hardship of the people affected, and the urgency of their need for assistance, with a view to determining the level of relief grant. As the circumstances vary from case to case, DOs may need to conduct home visits when necessary.

(4) With reference to the Consumer Price Index (A) (CPI(A)), the HAD raised the ceiling of relief grant to \$8,000 in 2000. Having considered that the ceiling of relief grant has not been adjusted for many years, the HAD is now reviewing the ceiling of relief grant based on the changes in CPI(A).

(5) In the past five years, no donation to the ERF from the public was received, and the total amount of grants approved under the ERF during the period is at Annex 4.