

Ombudsman probes Food and Environmental Hygiene Department's monitoring of outsourced street cleansing services and Government's management of public toilets (with photos)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (May 15) announced two direct investigations to examine: (1) the monitoring of outsourced street cleansing services by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD); and (2) the Government's management of public toilets.

Street cleansing services are provided by the FEHD via contractors hired through a tendering mechanism ("outsourced contractors"). There are public views that the "lowest bid wins" principle adopted throughout the years in tendering exercises for street cleansing services has led to poor services, which have come under frequent criticism. Moreover, some people consider the FEHD's monitoring of the performance of outsourced contractors inadequate, that piles of rubbish can often be seen on streets, and that cleansing services at environmental hygiene black spots still need strengthening.

As regards the management of public toilets, about 800 public toilets in the territory are under the FEHD's management. Their daily cleansing and minor repairs are taken up by the department's outsourced contractors. Repairs and maintenance works of larger scales are normally referred to the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) for follow-up. Meanwhile, the FEHD makes recommendations to the ArchSD every year to renovate certain public toilets, taking into account the maintenance conditions, usage rates and locations (whether a toilet is located near a tourist attraction) of each public toilet. Nevertheless, there are media reports from time to time that some public toilets have poor hygiene conditions or are dilapidated, and damaged facilities often take a long time to repair. These situations have not only caused inconvenience to the public but also affected tourists' impressions of Hong Kong.

Ms Chiu said, "The cleanliness of streets and the hygiene conditions of public toilets are closely related to our daily life. They also have impacts on the reputation of Hong Kong as a world city. We are initiating these two direct investigations to examine the Government's mechanisms and practices with regard to the monitoring of outsourced street cleansing services and the management of public toilets, with a view to making recommendations to the Government for improvement where necessary."

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to send information and their views on the above two topics in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by June 16, 2019:

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