

Ombudsman probes Government's handling of two trees in front of Tang Chi Ngong Building of University of Hong Kong

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Connie Lau, today (June 4) announced her Office's initiation of a direct investigation to examine whether there was maladministration in the Government's decisions and actions in respect of its felling of two trees in front of Tang Chi Ngong Building of the University of Hong Kong on May 20, 2018.

The felling of the two banyan trees by the Lands Department (LandsD) has attracted wide media coverage and public debate. Some criticised that the departments concerned had not taken due care of the health conditions of the two trees, nor had they sufficiently consulted relevant experts and the local community.

In this light, The Ombudsman has decided to investigate whether the decisions and actions of the departments concerned, namely LandsD, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and the Tree Management Office (TMO) of the Development Bureau, were in line with the relevant policies and procedures. This direct investigation will cover:

- (1) how LandsD had looked after the two trees, and whether its decision to fell the trees had sufficient grounds;
- (2) the role and involvement of the TMO in the incident;
- (3) whether the HAD had duly assisted in conducting local consultation; and
- (4) whether there are inadequacies and areas for improvement on the part of the departments concerned.

Back in June 2016, the Office of The Ombudsman published two direct investigation reports entitled "Government's Handling of Four Stonewall Trees along Bonham Road" and "Government's Tree Management Regime and Practices", and made a number of recommendations to the Government for improvement. The Office has been monitoring the progress of implementation of those recommendations by the departments concerned.