

# Ombudsman probes Leisure and Cultural Services Department's allocation of swimming lanes in public swimming pools and its monitoring mechanism (with photo)

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

The Ombudsman, Ms Connie Lau, today (July 17) announced a direct investigation into the mechanism of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) for allocating swimming lanes in public swimming pools to examine whether the mechanism is effective and the department has fulfilled its responsibility as the monitoring authority.

To promote sports development and training, the LCSD assigns certain time slots of some swimming lanes in its public swimming pools to six sports associations for training and examination purposes. These associations then allocate the lanes to their affiliated clubs.

Recently, there were media reports about unfairness in some sports associations' systems for allocating swimming lanes, resulting in undue advantage to the large-scale affiliated clubs at the expense of the smaller clubs. Moreover, there were allegations of irregularities such as transfer of benefits and violation of conditions of use.

A preliminary inquiry by the Office of The Ombudsman revealed that under the Central Lane Allocation Scheme that the LCSD has implemented since 2005, the LCSD will give priority and allocate swimming lanes to the aforesaid sports associations, which will then allocate the lanes to their affiliated clubs based on the associations' own rating systems. Nevertheless, there are queries on whether the LCSD has fulfilled its monitoring responsibilities to ensure that the rating systems are reasonable and those affiliated clubs are genuinely non-profit-making, and whether there are improper transfers of the right to use the swimming lanes.

Ms Lau said, "The Government has a duty to promote and support sports development. It is understandable that the Government has given priority and allocates some swimming lanes to several sports associations for their training and examination uses. However, as swimming lanes are valuable public resources, the Government must ensure good use of the limited recreational and sports facilities to meet public demands and balance the interests of different parties. When the LCSD gives those sports associations priority and grants them the right to allocate some swimming lanes, the department must ensure that the public resources are properly used. For instance, the LCSD should check if any of the swimming clubs currently using the swimming lanes have engaged in improper profit-making activities and violated the conditions

of use. Whether the LCSD has properly delivered its monitoring duties and taken due follow-up action therefore warrants our thorough investigation."

The ambit of this direct investigation covers:

- (1) whether the LCSD's mechanism for allocating swimming lanes in public swimming pools is effective;
- (2) whether the LCSD has sufficient monitoring of sports associations' allocation of those lanes among their affiliated clubs;
- (3) whether the LCSD has sufficient monitoring of swimming clubs' compliance with the conditions of use of those lanes; and
- (4) any areas for improvement.

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to send their views in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by September 17, 2018:

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