

LCQ1: Road safety of cyclists

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Chun-keung and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

It is learnt that public demand for food delivery services has been keen in recent years and most takeaway food couriers deliver takeaway food by bicycles, leading to a significant increase in the number of bicycles on roads. Many motorists have relayed that some cyclists have a weak awareness of obeying traffic regulations, including not wearing helmets and riding fast on roads, which affects the safety of other road users. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of summonses issued as well as the numbers of traffic accidents and casualties involving cyclists contravening traffic regulations in each of the past five years and, among such accidents, the numbers of those involving takeaway food couriers;

(2) whether it will step up training, education and publicity on cycling among takeaway food couriers, so as to enhance their road safety awareness and reduce traffic accidents involving them; and

(3) whether it will consider requiring cyclists to obtain specific licences by taking tests and wear reflective clothing when cycling, and stipulating that bicycles must be fitted with reflective markings before they can be used on roads; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to cycling safety and, where road safety considerations and circumstances permit, foster a "bicycle-friendly environment" by constructing or improving cycle tracks and related facilities in new development areas and new towns, with a view to facilitating the public to use bicycles for short-distance commuting or recreational purposes and thereby reducing the use of mechanised transport. In urban areas, the traffic is generally very heavy while the roads are narrow and crowded, and there are frequent on-street loading and unloading activities with many vehicles passing and stopping by the roadside for a brief period of time. Due to road safety considerations, the Government does not encourage the public to use bicycles as a mode of transport in urban areas. The Transport Department (TD) and the Hong Kong Police Force (the Police) have been monitoring and analysing the statistics and situation of cycling accidents, implementing appropriate enhancement measures, and rolling out publicity and public education activities.

In consultation with the TD and the Police, I would like to reply to the question raised by the Hon Lee Chun-keung as follows:

(1) The numbers of prosecutions against cycling offences and the numbers of accidents and casualties involving bicycles (including cyclists and other road users killed/injured in the accidents) in each of the past five years are tabulated below:

Year	Number of prosecutions [^]	Number of accidents				Number of casualties			
		Fatal#	Serious#	Slight#	Total	Killed	Seriously injured	Slightly injured	Total
2019	2 350	8	183	1 547	1 738	8	186	1 605	1 799
2020	4 018	17	457	2 263	2 737	17	460	2 345	2 822
2021	6 768	8	507	2 479	2 994	8	508	2 601	3 117
2022	5 832	10	143	2 071	2 224	10	144	2 156	2 310
2023	4 094	6*	104*	1 866*	1 976*	6*	106*	1 935*	2 047*

[^] The numbers of prosecutions cover traffic offences involving the use of bicycles, including reckless or careless cycling, cycling without switching on the lights during hours of darkness, not following traffic signals or signs, carrying passengers when cycling and cycling on pavements.

A "fatal accident" is an accident in which one or more persons die within 30 days of the accident; a "serious accident" is an accident in which one or more persons are injured and stayed in hospital for more than 12 hours; and a "slight accident" is an accident in which one or more persons are injured or stayed in hospital for not more than 12 hours if necessary.

* Provisional figures

Both the TD and the Police have not maintained a breakdown of the number of traffic accidents and related casualties involving couriers of food delivery. The Police conducted a one-off thematic study in respect of traffic accidents involving bicycles (including fatal and seriously injured cases) occurred in the first six months of 2021, and collated the number of traffic accidents and casualties related to food delivery. The findings indicated that the number of cycling accidents involving food delivery with fatal and seriously injured cases accounted for about 0.1 per cent (i.e. about one of a thousand) of the total number of traffic accidents across the city during the same period, with eight people seriously injured and no fatalities. Overall speaking, the number of traffic accidents and casualties involving bicycles has shown a downward trend since 2021.

(2) The Government will continue enhancing the safety awareness of road users through publicity, education and enforcement work. The TD has been collaborating with the Road Safety Council and the Police in launching various publicity and educational activities with a view to promoting road

safety to all road users (including cyclists). Examples include publishing and distributing the Road Safety Bulletins and publicity publications, organising road safety seminars for food delivery platforms, affixing full-height publicity posters to traffic signal controllers, making and telecasting publicity video clips on the Internet, disseminating cycling safety information through social media platforms and so forth, so that cyclists understand road safety matters that require their attention, including following the traffic rules at all times and wearing personal protective gear (such as safety helmets). The Police will also visit various community centres, bicycle rental shops, cycling clubs, automobile associations and food delivery operators, etc, to promote cycling safety information and remind road users to pay attention to cycling safety.

(3) Same as the common practice in other regions, there is currently no requirement in Hong Kong for cyclists to obtain the relevant driving licenses. However, as bicycles are regarded as vehicles, cyclists have the same obligation to follow the laws and regulations applicable to drivers when cycling on the road. These include the relevant provisions of the Road Traffic Ordinance (Cap. 374) and its subsidiary legislation, as well as the Road Users' Code (RUC). Among the ten chapters in the RUC, one of them is "For Cyclists". Failing to observe the RUC may be taken into account by the court when deciding the liability of a road user and whether he/she was in contravention of the laws, and to what extent it was his/her fault. Therefore, cyclists should observe the RUC to safeguard the safety of themselves and other road users.

On the requirements of reflectors, the Road Traffic (Construction and Maintenance of Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374A) already contain the relevant mandatory requirements, specifying the standards of installation of reflectors on bicycles. Moreover, according to the RUC, cyclists are required to wear bright, light-coloured, fluorescent or reflective clothing or wear reflective belts to make themselves more visible (including in the dark and in poor light) to other road users.

The Government will closely monitor the issue of cycling safety and continue its efforts on publicity and education to encourage cyclists to pay attention to and comply with the relevant laws and regulations, thereby promoting public awareness of cycling safety and reducing traffic accidents. In addition, cycling safety is one of the "selected traffic enforcement priorities", and the Police will take enforcement actions against cycling violations.

Thank you, President.

LCQ13: Maintenance of trees and flowers

Following is a question by the Hon Luk Chung-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

It has been learnt that in recent years, popular plants such as sweet gums, tabebuia chrysantha and cherry blossoms have respectively been planted at Tai Tong Sweet Gum Woods in Tai Lam Country Park, Nam Cheong Park and on the airport island, among other locations, attracting viewing and "checking-in" by members of the public and tourists. On the other hand, there are views that Hong Kong's climate is suitable for the planting of various tree and flower species, and that spectacular scenery of colourful blooms is not only pleasing to the eyes, but can also promote the development of the tourism industry and drive the economy. However, it is learnt that at present, the tree and flower species planted in most districts of Hong Kong are relatively homogeneous and without proper maintenance. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of tree management personnel in various government departments, and (ii) the top 10 major tree or flower species under their management and their numbers;

(2) whether the Tree Management Office of the Development Bureau and/or various tree management departments have formulated new criteria for determining the tree or flower species to be planted;

(3) whether it will consider planting more trees or flowers of different species in more places to create scenic spots with district characteristics; if so, of the locations and species; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will introduce more new techniques to ensure that trees or flowers stay aesthetically pleasing and healthy; if so, of the details, and how the authorities ensure that the staff of the government departments and/or the contractors concerned can master such techniques; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether it has implemented human resources plans for the arboriculture profession and provided more professional training for tree management personnel in both the public and private sectors, so as to ensure that there will be sufficient arboriculture professionals to cope with the future demand and even facilitate the development of the arboriculture industry?

Reply:

President,

The Development Bureau (DEVB) advocates the principle of "Right Plant, Right Place" and seeks to enhance the landscape and tree management arrangements, with a view to developing a sustainable urban landscape and making Hong Kong a more liveable city. In recent years, when choosing plants for landscape design, various government departments have attached much importance to enhancing biodiversity, improving local ecological environments and preparing for climate change. They are also choosing more species with conspicuous flowers to enrich the landscape. My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The number of trees maintained by core tree management departments and the number of their tree management personnel, inclusive of staff of departments and contractors (as at the end of 2023), are tabulated below:

Core tree management department	Number of trees (rounded to the nearest 100)	Number
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department	28 400 (Note 2)	87
Architectural Services Department	143 700	209
Civil Engineering and Development Department	40 500 (Note 3)	128 (N
Drainage Services Department	16 900	95
Highways Department	580 300	215
Housing Department	87 500	255
Lands Department	Not applicable (Note 4)	215
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	542 600	313
Water Supplies Department	149 100	42

Note 1: The figures represent the number of staff involved in day-to-day tree management only. Those temporarily deployed on a need basis and management personnel at the strategic level are not included.

Note 2: The figure represents the number of trees in frequently used areas and facilities in country parks only.

Note 3: The numbers of trees and tree management personnel in infrastructural projects will vary at different project stages.

Note 4: The unallocated and unleased government land (UUGL) is under the jurisdiction of the Lands Department, which is responsible for providing non-routine tree maintenance on UUGL that is not maintained by any designated government departments. The exact number of trees on UUGL is not available due to the large number of trees.

According to the data collated from the core tree management

departments, the ten most common tree species (in descending order) are Taiwan Acacia (*Acacia confusa*), Paper-bark Tree (*Melaleuca cajuputi*), Chinese Banyan (*Ficus microcarpa*), Elephant's Ear (*Macaranga tanarius*), Chinese Fan-palm (*Livistona chinensis*), Queen Crape Myrtle (*Lagerstroemia speciosa*), Chinese Hackberry (*Celtis sinensis*), Horsetail Tree (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), Candlenut Tree (*Aleurites moluccana*) and Camphor Tree (*Cinnamomum camphora*), with about 270 000 trees in total. Government departments have been planting more plants with special features in recent years, such as Yellow Pui (*Tabebuia chrysantha*), Rosy Trumpet Tree (*Tabebuia rosea*), Sweet Viburnum (*Viburnum odoratissimum*), Golden Penda (*Xanthostemon chrysanthus*) and Scarlet Sterculia (*Sterculia lanceolata*) planted in urban areas, as well as Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar formosana*), Schima (*Schima superba*) and Hong Kong Gordonia (*Polyspora axillaris*) planted in rural areas.

(2) and (3) The "Right Plant, Right Place" principle advocated by the DEVB encompasses considerations such as availability of planting space; adaptability, characteristics and matching of species; as well as compatibility with landscape designs and the environs. The DEVB encourages the tree management departments and the industry to plant the right plants which can suit the environment and attain the designed functions while allowing them to grow healthily in a sustainable manner. To this end, the DEVB published in 2018 the "Street Tree Selection Guide", which was subsequently updated in 2023, to provide information on 80 tree species for reference by various departments and the industry, thereby encouraging higher diversity of urban tree species.

With reference to district characteristics, we have formulated Greening Master Plans for every district, which provide recommendations on thematic planting, including the planting of trees with conspicuous flowers. In addition, we encourage tree management departments and works departments to consider planting more plants with conspicuous flowers at suitable locations in new projects and within existing green spaces.

At present, more plants with conspicuous flowers have been planted in various districts, such as the cherry blossoms in On King Street Park near Shek Mun in Sha Tin, Tai Po Waterfront Park and Hong Kong Velodrome Park in Tseung Kwan O; the *Tabebuia* trees of different colours in Nam Cheong Park and Tin Shui Wai Park; the Flame of the Forest (*Delonix regia*) in Tuen Mun Park and along the riverside of the Kwong Fuk Bridge in Tai Po; as well as the Hong Kong Orchid Tree (*Bauhinia blakeana*) in Kowloon Tsai Park. In 2023, the Government announced the launching of the "Shining City Project" to carry out urban beautification work along the Shing Mun River and the Yuen Long Nullah. Such work includes the planting of trees with conspicuous flowers, such as Camel's Foot Tree (*Bauhinia variegata*), Yellow Pui (*Tabebuia chrysantha*) and cherry blossoms along both sides of the Shing Mun River, and the planting of Beautiful Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea spectabilis*) and other shrubs with conspicuous flowers along both sides of the Yuen Long Nullah.

(4) To promote healthy growth of plants, the DEVB promulgated a technical circular that requires new at-grade road projects to reserve sufficient growing space for roadside greening. In addition, the DEVB formulated the

"Guidelines on Soil Improvement" and the "Guidelines on Soil Volume for Urban Trees", which provide strategies and methods for soil improvement and set out design standards for soil volume and soil depth for newly planted trees.

The adoption of applicable technology in tree management provides useful aids in monitoring the health and structure of trees and tracking their changes and anomalies. In view of this, the DEVB has been proactively identifying emerging know-how to enhance tree management, co-operating with local institutions in trying out potential technology through research and pilot projects, and sharing the relevant progress and experience with tree management departments. Major technologies currently in use or on trial include tree tilt sensors, root detection systems with tomographic scanning, remote sensing multispectral imaging and 3D LiDAR sketching. The outcomes of the relevant research and pilot projects will be disseminated through guidelines or sharing sessions as appropriate, thereby enabling staff of relevant government departments and contractors to master the technologies.

(5) The Government has long been concerned about the manpower situation of the industry, and has been allocating resources to the training of tree management personnel. In mid-2020, the DEVB launched the \$200 million Urban Forestry Support Fund to attract more entrants to the arboriculture and horticulture industry, so as to meet the demand for manpower and uplift the professional standards of practitioners. With support of the Fund, various new initiatives have been rolled out, including the Study Sponsorship Scheme which provides sponsorships and scholarships to encourage more people to undertake arboriculture, tree management and arboriculture-related programmes. Training allowances are also provided for arboriculture and tree management graduates through the Trainee Programme to help them receive structured on-the-job training to acquire actual work experience, with training periods lasting from 18 months to three years. The Government also launched the Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel in December 2020, which encourages all eligible in-service arboriculture practitioners to register on a voluntary basis in order to uplift the standard of arboriculture practitioners. As at end-2023, over 870 practitioners have registered under the scheme. Moreover, the DEVB provides staff of government departments with over 5 000 training places annually, covering various areas of tree management which include professional training.

LCQ6: Kai Tak Sports Park

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Mr Raistlin Lau, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

The Government has indicated that the Kai Tak Sports Park (KTSP) will open in the first half of next year, and will host eight events of the 15th National Games including Fencing, Men's Handball, Rugby Sevens and Bowling. In addition, it has been reported that the Hong Kong Sevens will also be moved to stage at the KTSP next year. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows if there will be other major sports events and large-scale cultural and entertainment events such as concerts and variety shows staging at the KTSP next year; if there will be, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether the authorities will request the operator of the KTSP to discuss with the Transport Department the transport arrangements to be made during the staging of major sports events next year, including the provision of fare-paying tour coaches to transport spectators to and from nearby MTR stations, the introduction of more bus routes to and from the KTSP, and the construction of a smart car park at an adjacent site to divert the flow of spectators; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will produce pamphlets to recommend to spectators attending matches at the KTSP the neighbouring attractions such as those for food and entertainment, so as to provide them with better leisure experiences; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Occupying an area of about 28 hectares and being the largest sports infrastructure project in Hong Kong's history, the Kai Tak Sports Park (KTSP) is crucial to the Government's implementation of sports policies of promoting sports in the community, supporting elite sports, developing Hong Kong into a centre for major international sports events, enhancing professionalism and developing sports as an industry. The KTSP adopts a "Design, Build and Operate" model, with Kai Tak Sports Park Limited (KTSPL) as the Contracted Party responsible for the design, construction and future operation of the KTSP. The contract is for 25 years, including five years for design and construction and approximately 20 years for operation. The Contracted Party operates on a self-financing basis and is required to make fixed payments to the Government on a regular basis and share a percentage of its total income with the Government.

The KTSP will provide modern and multi-purpose sports and recreation facilities upon completion, including a 50 000-seat Main Stadium, a 10 000-seat Indoor Sports Centre, a 5 000-seat Public Sports Ground and about 14-hectare landscaped open space and other ancillary facilities. Among others, the Main Stadium, equipping with a retractable roof, offering different stage positioning and seating configurations as well as adopting a flexible pitch system design, provides more options for hosting different types of large-scale cultural and entertainment events such as concerts.

My consolidated reply to the questions raised by the Hon Yang Wing-kit is as follows:

Currently, the main structure of the Public Sports Ground, the Indoor Sports Centre and the Main Stadium have been largely completed. According to the current construction progress, we expect that the major facilities of the KTSP will be completed by end of 2024. Upon successful implementation of the test events and satisfactory completion of various testing, the KTSP will be open in the first half of 2025. To better prepare for the opening, we are working with KTSPL on the pre-commissioning arrangements, including the close monitoring of work progress, the preparation for test events as well as the testing of facilities such as scoring, public address and lighting systems of various venues. We will also, in collaboration with KTSPL and relevant departments, arrange for various trials to fine-tune and enhance the operation model and various arrangements when staging large-scale events.

In terms of event arrangements, KTSPL has been liaising closely with different government departments and relevant stakeholders, including "national sports associations", representatives of the sports sector, entertainment and performance industry, to understand more about their needs and interests towards the facilities of the KTSP. KTSPL also proactively reaches out to and follows up with organisations that are interested in organising events in the KTSP, with a view to jointly promoting the KTSP as "the destination" for local and international large-scale sports and entertainment events as well as adding more vibrancy to Hong Kong as an events capital.

KTSPL has so far made contact with over 200 local and international sports and non-sports events' promotion bodies, organisations and agencies, among which around 50 of them have expressed interest in utilising the facilities at the KTSP and are learning about the leasing arrangements. Such discussion, involving commercial negotiations, is still ongoing. Generally speaking, the promotion strategy of events is led by organisers whereas KTSPL, being the venue provider, has to act in concert with the plans of the event organisers. KTSPL cannot disclose details of the events before the organisers do so in accordance with the lease agreements. We trust that event organisers will take into account their overall promotion strategy and share more details of their events with the public in due course.

As regards transportation arrangements, the KTSP is located at the core of the Kai Tak Development Area with diversified, efficient and convenient transportation facilities. It is in proximity to Kai Tak Station and Sung Wong Toi Station of the MTR with about 10 to 15 minutes' walking distance from both stations. Apart from using the convenient railway network to travel to or from the KTSP, the public can also take a number of bus routes at nearby bus stops connecting to various districts in Hong Kong, Kowloon and the New Territories. Apart from the supporting facilities such as taxi stands and more than 800 parking spaces in the precinct, the shopping malls near the KTSP also provide ancillary facilities such as car park for public use, meeting the travelling needs of the public in different modes. During the

staging of large-scale events, we will closely liaise with KTSPL, relevant departments (including Hong Kong Police Force and the Transport Department etc.) and transport operators as early as possible. Depending on the scale of the events and the needs of the visitors, we will deploy contingency measures such as strengthening railway services and arranging special services to meet the additional traffic demand during the event period. We will also test the effectiveness of relevant transportation arrangements when the test events are staged so that we can adjust relevant strategies as necessary to improve response efficiency.

On improving the experience of visitors to the KTSP, the precinct offers various kinds of catering facilities, including some 70 outlets of international cuisines, mobile catering booths that can be flexibly arranged according to the scale and needs of the events as well as nine diversified concept restaurants at the Dining Cove for citizens and tourists to dine in the indoor or outdoor areas. The neighbouring districts of Kowloon City and To Kwa Wan which are in close proximity of the KTSP also provide an array of dining options. Citizens and tourists who visit the KTSP for matches or large-scale events can easily proceed to the two districts for a taste of our local culinary delights. The mobile app to be developed by KTSPL will provide visitors with one-stop services, including promotion information on leisure and catering options as well as various events. We will continue to work closely with KTSPL to further enhance visitors' experience as well as liaise with relevant departments and the Hong Kong Tourism Board to promote the leisure and catering options in the vicinity of the KTSP so as to create a synergy effect for bringing about local economic development.

With concerted efforts of various participating departments and units, the construction of the KTSP has entered its final stage. We believe that Hong Kong citizens, like us, are eagerly anticipating the completion and opening of the KTSP. The KTSP will bring about significant synergy to the development of Hong Kong. While promoting sports in the community, supporting elite sports, maintaining Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events, enhancing professionalism and developing sports as an industry, the KTSP will also drive the development of related industries such as entertainment, performances and tourism. The Cultural, Sports and Tourism Bureau will continue to work closely with KTSPL and various government departments. An inter-departmental working group led by the Chief Secretary for Administration will also be set up to co-ordinate relevant work with a view to ensuring the successful completion and commissioning of the KTSP, thereby creating a new landmark of Hong Kong. Thank you President.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, May 22, 2024 is 106.1 (same as yesterday's index).

LCQ17: Refurbishment of recovered public rental housing flats

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question:

Regarding the refurbishment of recovered public rental housing (PRH) flats, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the average number of days between PRH tenants who had successfully purchased flats under the Home Ownership Scheme and the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme took over the keys of the purchased flats and moved out of their PRH flats in the past three years, and among such PRH tenants, the number and percentage of those who had applied for extended stay in PRH flats;

(2) of the process for reinstating the fittings and fixtures in PRH flats by PRH tenants when they move out of their flats;

(3) given that according to the Hong Kong Housing Authority's key performance indicators, refurbishment of vacant PRH flats is required to be completed within 44 days, of the longest, shortest and average time required for the Housing Department (HD) to refurbish such flats in the past three years; and

(4) as the Government has indicated in the reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on April 10 this year that if the fixtures and fittings installed by the outgoing PRH tenant are in good conditions, the HD will generally allow them to be retained without having to be reinstated such that the prospective tenant can choose to keep using them, whether there is any case in which the incoming tenant chooses not to accept such fixtures and fittings and, under such circumstances, who will be responsible for the costs of reinstating such fixtures and fittings?

Reply:

President,

In order to expedite the process of recovering of public rental housing (PRH) flats and minimise the period of receiving double housing benefit, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) will require tenants who have purchased subsidised sale flats (SSFs) to return their PRH flats as soon as possible. According to the prevailing policy, PRH tenants are required to terminate the original tenancies and surrender the existing PRH flats to the HA within

60 days upon (i) taking over keys of the flats purchased (including Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) and Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme (GSH)); or (ii) the 10th working day from the date of execution of the deed of assignment of the flat purchased, whichever is earlier. In case of need, households concerned may apply for an extended stay for a maximum period of 30 days, during which they are required to pay an occupation fee on a daily basis equivalent to triple net rent plus rates; or if they are market rent payers at the time of termination of tenancy, to pay market rent or triple net rent plus rates (whichever is the higher).

In consideration of the need to deal with more vacant flats in the future, the Housing Department (HD) has optimised the workflow of vacant flat refurbishment to expedite the works progress, and implemented a new mechanism to provide contractors with information of housing estates, including the type and size of flat units, that become vacant due to the purchase of SSFs at least three months in advance. This allows the contractors to make prior arrangement for manpower and materials required for the refurbishment works.

In addition, upon receiving notification from tenants of their planned moving out from PRH flats due to the purchase of SSFs, the HD will arrange a preliminary vacating inspection with the tenants in existing flats within 10 working days from the date when they take over the keys of the new purchased flat, and at the same time the HD will inform the tenants of the items to be removed or reinstated before they return the existing flat, so as to allow the tenants to budget early and choose to arrange the reinstatement works themselves or pay the HD for carrying out the reinstatement works; such arrangement can also facilitate HA's contractors to have better resource and manpower planning for timely completion of works. The HD frontline and managerial staff at different levels will convene regular meetings with contractors to review the overall progress and performance of refurbishment works, supervise the contractors and resolve any difficulties that may be encountered during the progress of works, as well as to improve works efficiency and service quality.

Four HOS and GSH courts were completed in the past year, providing about 8 800 units. Many of the PRH tenants surrendered their PRH flats due to purchase of HOS and GSH flats. Coupled with the HD's tremendous efforts put in combating tenancy abuse of PRH flats, about 15 500 units were recovered for different reasons, which was 55 per cent more than an annual number of about 10 000 units in the past. In order to meet the challenge of an increasing vacant flat refurbishment works in the future, the HD is reviewing the standards of works and streamlining the workflow, with an aim of achieving the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of 44 days on average.

In response to the questions raised by the Hon Leung Man-kwong, the reply is as follows:

(1) In the past three years, among the cases of PRH tenants who had purchased first-hand HOS/GSH flats and surrendered their PRH units, the average time taken from the tenants' execution of the deed of assignments to the surrender of their PRH flats was around 70 days. In the past three years, among those

having successfully purchased flats under the HOS and the GSH, an average of about 1 360 households (61 per cent) applied for extension for returning PRH flats. One of the main reasons is that the renovation works of the newly purchased flats have not yet been completed.

(2) Under the prevailing arrangement, estate staff will arrange a preliminary vacating inspection at the existing flats with tenants or their representative and works staff of the HD within 10 working days from the date they collect the keys of SSFs purchased, so as to inform them the reinstatement items and the cost required if such are carried out by the HD. Tenants may choose to arrange the reinstatement works themselves or pay the HD for carrying out the reinstatement works. On the day when tenants hand over the flats, estate staff will further conduct a final vacating inspection together with the tenants or their representatives and works staff of the HD to ensure that original fixtures and facilities are properly reinstated. Otherwise, tenants will have to pay the HD for the reinstatement charges plus the prevailing administrative costs incurred.

(3) After a tenant has moved out from a public housing unit, the HD will conduct a comprehensive inspection of the landlord installations in the unit and arrange refurbishment works based on actual need, which generally include the removal and replacement of power supply, water supply and gas supply installations and equipment within the units; waterproofing and plaster works; installation of plumbing and drainage pipes, sanitary fitments, metal works and carpentry, painting works and post-completion cleaning, etc. In individual cases, the HD has to carry out major repairs in the recovered units and its adjacent flats or common areas, such as larger scale concrete repairs and water seepage repairs at upper floor units, etc. Yet, the repairs involving adjacent flats must be carried out before completion of vacant flat refurbishment works so as to maintain structural safety and integrity of the building. Despite the KPI of 44 days' turnaround time on average for vacant flat refurbishment works, the actual time required may vary depending on the number of units required to be refurbished at the same time, as well as the scope and complexity of the works for the individual units. Therefore, the overall time required to complete the refurbishment works for each vacant unit may be different. Once the contractor reports the completion of the refurbishment works, the HD will promptly arrange an inspection to ensure that the refurbished unit meets the required standards.

In the past three years, although part of the time was still during the epidemic, the average turnaround time for vacant flat refurbishment works was 45 days, which is very close to the KPI of 44 days. Among them, the shortest refurbishment time taken for some cases was only 19 days, while about 1 per cent of the vacant flats took more than 100 days to complete, the longest time required for one case was 197 days. The HD has reviewed the situation of individual vacant flats that took a longer time to complete the refurbishment, and found that in 2023, there was a significant increase in the number of public housing residents vacating their public housing flats due to purchasing SSFs as compared with the same period in previous years. In the first three quarters of 2023 alone, nearly 5 000 public housing households vacated their units after purchasing SSFs, which is approximately

three times higher than the average for the previous two years. In some regions, the number of vacant flats even doubled within a three-month period from May to July 2023. Owing to the sharp increase in the number of vacant units within a short period of time, the workload of vacant flat refurbishment works in some regions had exceeded the short-term capacity of the contractors in these regions. Although the HD anticipated an increase in vacant flat refurbishment works due to the sale exercises of SSFs and provided contractors with at least three months' advance notice to arrange for additional manpower and materials for the refurbishment works, the current shortage of skilled workers in the construction industry in Hong Kong had rendered difficulty for the contractors to recruit enough additional manpower to cater for the short-term surge in workload. In order to reduce the impact on prospective tenants, the HD has requested the contractors to appropriately adjust their sequence of work, accord priority to the refurbishment works of vacant flats that have already been allocated to prospective tenants; and expedite the progress of works. On the contrary, if the flat concerned has not yet been accepted by the applicant, the HD will accord the refurbishment works of that flat unit to a lower priority in the face of a sharp increase in the number of vacant flats in a short period of time.

Taking into account the need to deal with an increasing number of vacant flats in the future due to the purchase of SSFs, the HD is reviewing the workflow and standards for vacant flats refurbishment works in order to expedite the work progress. It is expected that the review will be completed in 2024.

(4) According to prevailing arrangement, the HD will conduct a comprehensive inspection of the installations and equipment in the units before public housing tenants move out from the flats. The HD will adopt a flexible and "people-oriented" approach to assess and determine which installations and equipment can be retained, repaired or need to be improved. If the fixtures and equipment installed by the previous tenant are in a good condition, the HD will generally retain them (i.e. there is no need for the outgoing tenants to reinstate to its original state) for the continued use by the incoming tenant. This arrangement not only reduces waste and construction debris, contributing to environment protection, but also helps reduce the decoration costs and time for incoming tenants, as well as the restoration time for outgoing tenants. Hence, it is generally welcomed by tenants. If a new tenant is unwilling to accept the installations and equipment in the unit that have been assessed by the HD as suitable for use, it is considered that he/she refuses to accept the allocation, and the unit will be immediately returned to the Applications Sub-section of the HD for re-allocation.