

LCQ18: Preparatory work for coping with inclement weather

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

Regarding the preparatory work for coping with inclement weather, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of flooding reports received by the Drainage Services Department (DSD) in each of the past three years, with a breakdown by the 18 districts across the territory; among the flooding locations involved in such reports, of the number of locations where flooding has recurred; whether the relevant government departments had subsequently investigated the causes of flooding in such locations and taken improvement measures; if so, of the progress of the relevant work;

(2) of the number of landslides triggered by rainstorms in each of the past three years; the number of footpaths and roads blocked and damaged as a result of landslides, and the average time taken for the relevant repair works; the works carried out by the authorities for landslide prevention and mitigation since the once-in-a-century torrential rain in September last year, and the progress of such works;

(3) as information from DSD shows that there are currently only four flooding blackspots in Hong Kong, but the locations where severe flooding occurred during typhoons and rainstorms in recent years were not flooding blackspots, whether the authorities will consider reviewing the data on flooding blackspots or formulating a separate mechanism, so as to enable members of the public to gain a clear understanding of the locations in the districts where they live that are prone to severe flooding, and enable the relevant government departments to accord priority to taking precautionary measures and conducting work such as clearing the blocked drains in the locations concerned;

(4) given that during typhoons and rainstorms in the past, shop operators and vehicle owners suffered losses due to the occurrence of flooding in a number of shopping malls and underground car parks, whether the authorities have systematically issued guidelines or recommendations on flood prevention to property management (PM) companies and PM staff; in respect of basements of shopping malls or underground floors of car parks which are prone to flooding, whether the authorities have special measures in place to assist the relevant owners' corporations and PM companies in taking proper flood prevention measures;

(5) as the Chief Executive has indicated in the 2023 Policy Address that the

\$8 billion drainage improvement works projects will be taken forward expeditiously, of the progress of the relevant works to date and the expected date of completion; as the Director of Drainage Services has indicated earlier on that a number of minor drainage improvement works have been implemented in various districts since the once-in-a-century torrential rain in September last year, of the number, geographical distribution and progress of such works to date, and whether such works can be completed before the onset of the rainy season this year; and

(6) whether it will conduct drills (including cross-government department drills) before the onset of the rainy season this year, so as to make good preparation for the overall contingency operations and disaster relief arrangements during rainstorms; if so, of the details; whether it will study ways to give advance warnings more effectively, so as to enable members of the public to make early preparation?

Reply:

President,

Hong Kong was repeatedly affected by extreme weather in September last year. In the evening of September 7, the Hong Kong Observatory recorded an hourly rainfall of 158.1 millimetres, the highest on record since 1884. In September and October last year, the cumulative rainfall recorded by the Hong Kong Observatory reached 1 600mm, accounting for about 60 per cent of the average annual rainfall. Despite facing the record-breaking heavy rain, the overall drainage capacity of stormwater drainage system in Hong Kong continued to function well, allowing society to return to its normal operations in the shortest time.

Adapting to the Hong Kong's topographic conditions, the Drainage Services Department (DSD) has been adopting a multi-pronged approach, including "stormwater interception", "flood storage" and "drainage improvement" to enhance the flood control capabilities of different areas in Hong Kong. Over the years, a vast number of drainage improvement works have been completed in various districts, which reduced the risk of flooding in the concerned areas. Currently, the DSD is carrying out 11 drainage improvement works. Besides, whenever a rainstorm or typhoon is forecasted, the DSD will plan in advance and early deploy inspection teams to the locations with higher risk of flooding to inspect and clear the blocked stormwater drainage system as needed. Moreover, whenever a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning Signal or a Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above is issued, the DSD will immediately activate its Emergency Control Centre to handle flooding cases and clear the blocked drainage channels and rivers. After the rainstorm, the DSD will also proactively inspect all major drainage channels and rivers, remove debris such as soil, rock, leaves and litters, and carry out necessary emergency repair works to prepare for the next rainstorm.

A consolidated reply to each part of the question is provided as follows:

(1) Between 2021 and 2023, the DSD confirmed a total of 257 reported flooding cases. Please refer to the Appendix I for the number of reported flooding cases in each district, among which 22 locations had more than one reported flooding case. The DSD reviewed the cause of each reported flooding case and found that the major causes of flooding were blockage at drainage inlets due to leaves, sediment or debris. The DSD have stepped up their clearance works to the drainage channels, and carried out pre-wet season inspection and the necessary drainage improvement measures.

(2) The Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) received 146, 76 and 601 reports of landslide incidents in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively; among them, the number of reported landslide incidents affecting footpaths or roads were 95, 37 and 340 respectively. Most emergency repair works were completed within days except for relatively major landslide incidents (such as the Yiu Hing Road landslide caused by the torrential rain in September 2023).

In order to cope with the landslide risk caused by rainstorms, relevant government departments and private owners have to regularly inspect and repair their slopes to ensure that they are properly maintained. In addition, the CEDD continues the Landslip Prevention and Mitigation Programme (LPMitP) for strengthening slopes against inclement weather according to a risk-based approach. The CEDD is conducting systematic investigations and studies on major landslide incidents triggered by rainstorms in recent years, including reviewing the criteria of the LPMitP for risk-based priority ranking for landslip prevention and mitigation works, according priority to those natural hillsides and man-made slopes that have the potential to have a greater impact on the daily life of the public, such as those adjacent to sole vehicular accesses, and carrying out mitigation works for more natural hillsides.

(3) Flooding blackspots are identified by the DSD taking into account the design drainage capacity of the stormwater drainage system, past flooding records, flooding complaints and flood protection standards at the relevant locations.

Based on past observations, many flooding cases were due to blockage at drainage inlets by leaves, sediment or debris being washed by the surface runoff and flooding causes were not related to the design capacity of drainage system. The DSD has identified some 220 locations in the territory that are prone to flooding due to blockages from debris or leaves. Whenever a rainstorm is forecasted, the DSD will arrange and deploy resources to step up their inspections. If a drain is found clogged, clearance works will be carried out immediately in order to reduce the flood risk.

(4) The DSD promulgated a practice note on flood resilience and emergency response measures and has uploaded it to its website for public reference. The practice note includes suitable flood resilience measures for commercial basement area or underground carpark, such as installing demountable flood barriers and elevating entrance and exit platforms. For emergency response measures, the practice note promotes the preparation of contingency plans and conducting drills. Before the rainy season, the DSD arranges to have meetings

with relevant stakeholders, including government departments, public organisations, public utilities companies and property management organisations in order to enhance their understanding of flood resilience and emergency response measures. The DSD also liaises with residential estate management companies to provide technical advice on preventing flooding in the housing estates' underground car parks and basement areas, etc.

(5) The DSD plans to seek funding of approximately HK\$8 billion (at September 2023 price level) for seven drainage improvement works projects in various districts (namely Mong Kok, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Hong Kong Island East, Tai Po, Sha Tin and Sai Kung) in 2024-25. The DSD has expedited the works and conducted parallel tendering to shorten the procurement time, with an aim to commencing the improvement works projects as early as possible after obtaining funding approval. It is targeted to complete the seven drainage improvement works projects in phases within approximately 3.5 to six years.

Since September last year, in order to reduce the flood risk over the territory, the DSD has been implementing a series of follow-up measures, including around 120 minor improvement works such as improving the existing drainage inlets and constructing additional roadside gullies and drainage channels. Most of these improvement works were substantially completed.

(6) In order to cope with the extreme weather in the future, the Security Bureau will regularly hold inter-departmental drills before the typhoon season to strengthen the preparation, co-operation and co-ordination of various policy bureaux, departments and other relevant agencies to ensure that various departments and agencies would take prompt and effective contingency measures to deal with the impact of extreme weather, allowing the society to return to normal as soon as possible. This year's inter-departmental drill, which will be held in May, will simulate a super typhoon hitting Hong Kong, causing extensive property damage and severe obstruction of trunk roads. Each participant is required to explain the contingency actions to deal with different scenarios so that all participants can better understand each other's roles and responsibilities when dealing with super typhoons, helping various departments make adequate preparation and enhance their co-ordination capabilities.

In respect of advance warning, the Government will continue to introduce advanced meteorological observation instruments and explore the use of technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence. It will also strengthen scientific research co-operation on meteorological data exchange, information communication and forecast technology with the meteorological departments in different areas to improve the monitoring of extreme weather and strengthen early warning and forecasting work, including weather forecast and warning, flooding, landslides. The Government will continue to strengthen its capabilities in all aspects to cope with the challenges posed by extreme weather for protecting the lives and property of Hong Kong citizens.

Enhanced security measures at High Court Building

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary announced today (April 24) that starting Saturday (April 27), security measures at the High Court Building (HCB) will be enhanced by extending security screening to cover all floors in the HCB.

With effect from April 27, all court users going to all the various floors of the HCB (including the floors on LG3/F to G/F) will be required to undergo security screening at the screening areas on either LG4/F or G/F. All court users should follow the directional signs and directives of the Judiciary staff or security personnel when entering the HCB.

Security screening, including body screening by metal detectors and bag inspection by X-ray baggage scanners, aims to prevent prohibited items such as knives, scissors, liquids, etc, from being brought into the court premises. This is an important security measure to ensure the safety of all court users.

As the screening procedures take time, the Judiciary urges all court users to arrive at the HCB earlier, in particular during peak hours in the morning or after lunch break.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, April 24, 2024 is 106.1 (same as yesterday's index).

LCQ11: Fire safety of old buildings

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Chun-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

It has been reported that a No. 3 alarm fire which broke out in a building in Yau Ma Tei earlier resulted in multiple casualties, arousing concerns about the fire safety of old buildings in urban areas, particularly those "three-nil buildings" that do not have owners' corporations or any form of residents' organisations, nor employ property management companies. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of inspections conducted by the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Buildings Department (BD) in respect of the fire safety of old buildings and three-nil buildings in urban areas in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by District Council district);

(2) given that when the relevant buildings are found not to comply with the requirements of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572), FSD and BD will issue Fire Safety Directions (Directions) to the owners and/or occupiers of such buildings, requiring them to carry out the specified fire safety improvement works, of the total number of Directions issued in each of the past 10 years, as well as the status of compliance with such Directions;

(3) whether a mechanism has been put in place to ensure that the Directions are complied with at an appropriate time; if so, of the details, including whether the progress of compliance with the Directions is regularly reviewed so that follow-up actions can be taken in a timely manner; if there is no such mechanism, the reasons for that and how it ensures that the Directions will not ultimately sink like a stone;

(4) of the respective total numbers of applications received and approved under the third round of the Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme launched in 2023; and

(5) whether it has plans to assist owners or occupiers of old buildings in enhancing the fire safety of the buildings by making good use of technology; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Fire safety in old buildings is a matter of great concern to the Government. It has been the goal of the Government to provide residents and the community at large better protection by enhancing fire safety in buildings, especially the old ones. This also leads to the enactment of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572) (the Ordinance) in the first place. The Ordinance stipulates that composite and domestic buildings constructed on or before March 1, 1987, or with the plans of the building works first submitted to the Buildings Department (BD) for approval on or before that day (target buildings) must be enhanced to meet modern fire protection requirements. Under the Ordinance, the enforcement authority (EA) on fire safety measures in relation to planning, design and construction of

buildings is the Director of Buildings; while the EA in relation to fire service installations and equipment (FSIs) is the Director of Fire Services. The Fire Services Department (FSD) and the BD will issue Fire Safety Directions (Directions) to owners and/or occupiers with regard to fire safety measures of buildings under their respective purview and specify the required fire safety improvement works. The Ordinance aims to enhance the fire safety standards of target buildings, but this does not mean that these buildings are subject to imminent fire risks. In fact, these buildings were constructed in accordance with applicable construction and fire safety standards prevailing at the time when they were built, for meeting the relevant requirements at the time of their construction.

The EAs will deploy officers to conduct joint inspection of the target buildings. Then, in light of the actual condition of the building and in accordance with the requirements of the Ordinance, the EAs will issue Directions (Note) to owners and/or occupiers requiring them to provide appropriate FSIs and/or carry out works in relation to fire safety construction, with a view to enhancing the fire safety standards of their buildings. There are about 14 000 target buildings regulated under the Ordinance. As of end February 2024, the FSD and the BD have inspected about 10 920 target buildings and issued a total of over 360 000 Directions. Among the Directions issued, about 40 per cent of them have been complied with or discharged (i.e. no follow-up action is required for those Directions), with the remaining some 60 per cent are being followed-up on, including cases with works under preparation/cases in progress. The EAs will comprehensively review those cases which are being followed-up on. Relevant owner and/or occupier, who fails to comply with a Direction/Fire Safety Compliance Order (FSCO) without reasonable excuse, is guilty of an offence. The EAs can take enforcement action accordingly. In fact, since the Ordinance has come into force (as of end-February 2024), there are more than 3 600 cases, which had failed to comply with Directions/FSCO without reasonable excuse, being successfully prosecuted.

In order to further enhance the fire safety standards of old buildings, the Government is expediting the relevant work on amending the Ordinance to empower the FSD and the BD to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners who have failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance (hereafter, defaulted works), and to recover the relevant fees from them upon completion of the defaulted works. The Government is stepping up the relevant work and will shorten the time required for submitting the proposed amendment bill by two to three months, with a view to submitting it to the Legislative Council for scrutiny as soon as possible.

Through providing financial, technical and co-ordination support, as well as taking enforcement actions and other various measures, the Government, by adopting multi-pronged approach, will continue to strive for raising the compliance rate of the Ordinance, effectively enhancing the fire safety standards of old buildings so as to meet the policy objective of the Government.

In consultation with the relevant bureau and departments, my reply to

the question raised by the Hon Lee is as follows:

(1) The number of target buildings jointly inspected by the FSD and the BD in the past five years is tabulated below –

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of target buildings jointly inspected by the FSD and the BD	400	400	400	406	402

With regard to the number of inspections of target buildings under the implementation of the Ordinance, the number of inspections conducted by the FSD in the past five years is tabulated below# –

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of inspections of target buildings conducted by the FSD@	54 837	50 279	54 306	46 964	44 769

@ The FSD does not maintain breakdown on the above number of inspections by District Council districts.

The BD does not compile statistics on the number of inspections.

The EAs do not compile statistics on "three-nil" buildings regulated under the Ordinance.

(2) The number of Directions issued by the FSD and the BD and the compliance status in the past ten years are tabulated below –

	Number of Directions issued	Number of Directions complied with or discharged (i.e. no follow-up action required) in that year%
2014	22 007	8 280
2015	22 757	9 177
2016	17 499	9 016
2017	18 559	9 138
2018	25 712	9 739
2019	28 102	14 654
2020	17 022	12 391
2021	32 616	9 468
2022	22 300	9 606
2023	23 215	10 871
Total	229 789	102 340

% Directions that are discharged include Directions related to demolished buildings, as well as buildings that have been approved to adopt facilitation measures, etc.

(3) The EAs will take action to follow-up on the compliance status of Directions of relevant owners and/or occupiers after Directions were issued, with a view to ensuring the timely compliance of the Directions. Generally speaking, the EAs normally give building owners one year to comply with the Directions and, on the premise that basic fire safety will not be compromised, adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach in handling individual cases.

The FSD will carry out fire safety improvement works inspection to target buildings issued with Directions at least once per year, where the inspection includes reviewing whether fire safety improvement works has been commenced for the target building, or following up on the progress of works. If target building owners and/or occupiers need more time to prepare for and carry out the improvement works, the FSD will consider their applications for extending the compliance period of the Directions in the light of the justifications they provided and/or the scale of works involved, etc. For the BD, upon the expiry of the Directions, the Department will take follow-up actions in accordance with the situation of the cases. If target building owners and/or occupiers disregard the Directions, the BD will issue warning letter to the relevant owners and/or occupiers.

If owners and/or occupiers, without reasonable excuse, do not comply with the Directions, the EAs may apply to the Magistrate for a FSCO, ordering them to comply with the requirements of the FSCO. If the owners and/or occupiers of the target buildings do not comply with the Directions or the FSCOs without reasonable excuse, the EAs will consider instigating prosecution against the relevant owners and/or occupiers.

In addition, the FSD will take a risk-based approach in handling fire safety of old buildings and give priority to old buildings with relatively higher fire risk, such as those with higher building age, those without FSIs, building with single-staircase design, and "three-nil" building, etc. After Directions are issued to owners, the FSD will also render full assistance to owners for complying with the Directions, for example, sending representatives to attend owners' meetings to explain the requirements of the Ordinance, as well as proactively approaching works consultants or registered fire service installation contractors to render appropriate assistance and offer advice. If the owners do not comply with Directions proactively, the FSD will take resolute enforcement action and instigate prosecution against the relevant owners. On the other hand, the BD has all along improved the compliance status for Directions from various aspects. Taking prosecution as an example, the BD established the Fast Track Prosecution Unit in 2021 through internal redeployment of resources to step up prosecution effort against owners who had not complied with Directions. The BD will conduct inspection and will take enforcement actions resolutely if it is confirmed that there is non-compliance situation and the owners do not have reasonable excuse. The BD will re-prioritise its enforcement and prosecution actions, focus resources for handling high fire risk buildings such as single-staircase buildings, those with more guesthouses or subdivided units, and those with non-complied Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme notices and have yet to appoint a registered inspector, and streamline the procedures and

deploy manpower to expedite prosecution work. The Security Bureau and the FSD will also join the collaboration platform established by the Development Bureau last year, members comprising the BD, the Home Affairs Department and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA). The aim is to pay more attention on assisting owners' corporations and owners in complying with Directions by strengthening co-ordination among all parties concerned in case management and enhancing public education on the district level.

In addition, as mentioned above, we are stepping up the work on amending the Ordinance to empower the FSD and the BD to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners who have failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance. On the premise of not compromising the principle that timely and proper maintenance of private buildings is the responsibility of owners, amending the Ordinance and putting forward the defaulted works mechanism will enable owners with genuine needs to obtain assistance from the Government for the timely compliance of the relevant Directions. Moreover, the legislative amendment proposals also include different elements, such as increasing the penalties for non-compliance with Directions or FSCO, introducing provisions preventing any person from obstructing an owners' corporation in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, empowering the EAs to register Directions issued against the involved buildings or their relevant parts in the Land Registry, etc. The aforementioned elements will strengthen the deterrent effect, encourage owners to comply with the requirement of the Ordinance, so that the relevant Directions could be complied with in a timely manner.

On top of all of the above, the Government will continue to proactively provide various kinds of support (including support on financial, co-ordination among owners as well as technical (please refer to part 5 below for details) to assist owners in carrying out fire safety improvement works with a view to enhancing the compliance rate of the Ordinance.

(4) To assist owners of old buildings in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, the Government, in partnership with the URA, implemented a \$2 billion Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme (FSWS) in 2018, providing subsidies for carrying out fire safety improvement works. Subsequently, the Government increased the funding for the FSWS to a total of \$5.5 billion. In 2018 and 2020, the URA rolled out 2 rounds of applications. Since then, the URA launched the third round of application from April to September 2023, to assist more owners in need to enhance the fire safety standard of their buildings.

There were 2 249 and 734 applications meeting the basic application requirements in the first and second rounds of the FSWS applications respectively. The URA issued letters of Approval-in-principle to the applicants of the above 2 983 applications, and contacted them about the commencement of fire safety improvement works. For the third round, the URA received 1 307 applications meeting the basic application requirements. The URA is processing the applications and will issue to the applicants letters of Approval-in-principle in due course.

(5) With the rapid development of technology, we will continue to make better use of technology, proactively exploring the use of technology in various aspects to enhance fire safety. For target buildings, the EAs understand that individual target buildings may encounter difficulties in complying with the requirements of Directions due to their structural or spatial constraints or other reasons. The FSD has been in close co-operation with the Water Services Department and have put in place an array of facilitation measures, including "improvised hose reel systems (direct-feed type)" which allows buildings of three or fewer storeys to have their fire services systems operating on direct water supply from government mains (commonly known as town mains). After that, in July 2023, the FSD further introduced the improvised hose reel system (direct pumping design) and improvised fire hydrant/hose reel system (direct pumping design) for which the connection of fixed fire pumps to government mains is allowed for target buildings of four storeys or more storeys so that the installation of fire service water tank is not required, subject to the conditions that no contamination will be caused to the fresh water supply system and measures against unlawful water consumption are in place. These measures aim to assist target buildings in overcoming difficulties arising from technical or spatial constraints.

The BD is planning to develop an electronic inspection platform for its staff to use tablets to conduct inspections and record the building conditions in real time, so as to simplify the process of preparation of inspection reports with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of enforcement action.

The EAs will continue to explore how to make use of technology to overcome difficulties encountered by target building owners in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, so as to enhance the compliance rate of the Ordinance.

Note: If owners or occupiers do not comply with the Directions within a reasonable timeframe and fail to provide reasonable justifications, the EAs may apply to the Magistrate for a FSCO, ordering them to comply with the requirements of the FSCO. If they do not comply with the Directions or the FSCOs, they shall be guilty of an offence and are liable to a fine.

LCQ4: Manpower of dentists

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

In a discussion paper on "Proposed Amendments to the Dentists

Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156)" submitted on July 14 last year to the Panel on Health Services of this Council, the Government pointed out that Hong Kong had been facing a shortage of dentists, with only approximately 0.37 dentists per 1 000 population as at end 2022, lagging behind other countries; and according to the manpower projections for healthcare professionals conducted by the Government in 2020, the shortage of dentists in Hong Kong might persist till 2035. The Government indicated in January this year that it would introduce the amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156) into this Council in the first half of this year to provide new pathways for admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists for serving in specified institutions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the long-term target number set for locally trained dentists;

(2) whether it has assessed the numbers of dentists per 1 000 population in Hong Kong in 2035, 2040 and 2045; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given that the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Hong Kong is currently the only institution in Hong Kong that provides Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme, whether the Government has considered establishing a new dental school to increase the manpower of local dentists in the long run; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the various parts of the Member's question, the consolidated reply are as follows:

The Government's policy objective in healthcare manpower is to ensure a stable supply of healthcare manpower to meet the expected demand for healthcare services in Hong Kong. The Government carries out healthcare manpower projection on a triennial basis to project the manpower need required to fulfil service demands. The Government assesses the manpower target of different healthcare professions based on the projection result, rather than solely considering the healthcare profession to population ratio.

Dentists' manpower

For dentists, Hong Kong has a total of 2 876 registered dentists as at end December 2023. The dentist per 1 000 population is around 0.37. According to the Healthcare Manpower Projection 2020, the shortfall of dentist manpower was projected to be 115 and 102 in 2030 and 2035 respectively. The shortfall was expected to persist until 2040 before easing slightly. To increase dentist manpower, the Government increased the number of University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded first-year-first-degree places of the Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme on four occasions. The number increased from 50 in the 2009/10 academic year to 90 in the 2024/25 academic year, representing an increase of 80 per cent.

Enhancing manpower resources for dental profession

To safeguard the oral health of the public, the Government established the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care (the Working Group) in end 2022 to review the policy objectives, implementation strategies, service scopes and delivery models of oral health and dental care. The Working Group released an interim report in December 2023, recommending the Government to develop primary dental care services appropriate for different age groups by focusing on prevention of dental diseases, making use of the capacity of ancillary dental workers to complement to overall development need of primary dental care services. Another recommendation is to strengthen manpower supply of dental professionals. Specific measures include providing new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained dentists to alleviate their shortage, and enhancing training for ancillary dental workers to enable them to take on a greater role in primary dental care services.

To complement the development of oral health and dental care, the Government must take necessary measures to alleviate the existing manpower shortage of dental professions. Given the lead time required for training local dentists, as well as the practical constraints in expanding the teaching manpower and facilities, the Government cannot solely rely on increasing the number of local training places to address the imminent manpower shortage, particularly the acute shortage of dentists in the public sector. The Government introduced the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 (the Bill) into the Legislative Council to provide new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in specified institutions under the premise that the professional standards and patients' welfare are maintained.

At the same time, based on the risk-based principle, the Bill also suitably adjusts the areas of practice of ancillary dental workers, and introduces a statutory registration regime for both dental hygienists and dental therapists under the regulatory control of the Dental Council of Hong Kong (DCHK) while retitling ancillary dental workers as dental care professionals, with a view to recognising their professional status and ensuring patients' safety and service quality. According to information from the DCHK and the Department of Health (DH), there are a total of 613 registered dental hygienists and 237 dental therapists employed by Government as at February 2024. To enhance training for local ancillary dental workers, the training places of dental hygienists and dental therapists will be increased by the Government to nearly double from 95 in the 2023/24 academic year to 185 in the 2024/25 academic year. The DH will provide full tuition sponsorship to students studying the dental hygienist and dental therapist programmes starting from 2023/24 academic year in order to attract more individuals to join the industry.

The Health Bureau has earlier launched a new round of healthcare manpower projection to tie in with the planning exercise for the 2025-28 triennium of the UGC. Subject to the projection results, the Government will review the strategies for local healthcare manpower development and consider the need to further adjust the number of healthcare training places in the next triennium of UGC, as well as exploring long-term measures for the

training of healthcare professionals. The Government currently has no plan to set up a second dental school, which involves important policy considerations and substantial funding, while not being able to alleviate the shortage of dentists within a short period of time.

The Government will continue to keep in view the community's demand for dental care services and manpower situation of the profession, and suitably adjust the strategy to ensure the supply of dentists and ancillary dental workers, including the regular planning of training places based on manpower projection.