

Land Registry releases statistics for January

The Land Registry today (February 7) released its statistics for January 2022.

Land registration

* The number of sale and purchase agreements for all building units received for registration in January was 5,911 (-16.5 per cent compared with December 2021 and -4.8 per cent compared with January 2021)

* The 12-month moving average for January was 7,986 (0.3 per cent below the 12-month moving average for December 2021 but 26.5 per cent above that for January 2021)

* The total consideration for sale and purchase agreements in January was \$54.4 billion (-38.0 per cent compared with December 2021 and -18.6 per cent compared with January 2021)

* Among the sale and purchase agreements, 4,275 were for residential units (-16.9 per cent compared with December 2021 and -6.3 per cent compared with January 2021)

* The total consideration for sale and purchase agreements in respect of residential units was \$43.4 billion (-10.5 per cent compared with December 2021 but +9.3 per cent compared with January 2021)

Statistics on sales of residential units do not include sale and purchase agreements relating to sales of units under the Home Ownership Scheme, the Private Sector Participation Scheme, the Tenants Purchase Scheme, etc, unless the premium of the unit concerned has been paid after the sale restriction period.

Figures on sale and purchase agreements received for the past 12 months, the year-on-year rate of change and breakdown figures on residential sales have also been released.

As deeds may not be lodged with the Land Registry until up to 30 days after the transaction, these statistics generally relate to land transactions in the previous month.

Land search

* The number of searches of land registers made by the public in January was 429,213 (-1.6 per cent compared with December 2021 and -3.8 per cent compared with January 2021)

The statistics cover searches made at the counter, through the self-service terminals and via the Integrated Registration Information System Online Services.

Extension of suspension of face-to-face classes for all schools after Chinese New Year holidays

The Education Bureau (EDB) announced today (January 27) that since the epidemic situation is still severe, all kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools (including schools offering non-local curriculum) and private schools offering non-formal curriculum (commonly known as "tutorial schools") will extend the existing arrangements on suspension of face-to-face classes and on-campus activities until February 21.

The spokesman said, "During the period of face-to-face class suspension, schools will flexibly deploy various teaching modes to sustain students' learning at home. Schools should remain open, strictly put in place various anti-epidemic measures as stipulated in the 'Health Protection Measures for Schools' issued by the EDB and the 'Health Advice to Schools for the Prevention of COVID-19' issued by the Centre for Health Protection, and look after students who lack carers to take care of them at home. Schools will arrange for staff to be on duty to handle school affairs and answer parents' enquiries."

He continued, "Schools should continue to maintain communication with parents and students to show care for the learning and emotional needs of the students, and render appropriate assistance to parents. Schools should also remind parents to follow anti-epidemic measures and pay close attention to the health conditions of their children. Parents should avoid taking their children to crowded places with poor ventilation."

The spokesman added, "In view of the implementation of 'vaccine pass' arrangements at schools on February 24, we strongly urge unvaccinated school staff, persons providing on-campus services, parents and visitors to get vaccinated as soon as possible, otherwise they will not be allowed to enter the school premises. Eligible students should also get vaccinated as early as possible to protect themselves and their family members, and construct a more effective protective barrier for both schools and the community."

The EDB will closely monitor the situation and move in step with the development of the overall anti-epidemic measures in Hong Kong, continuously review the class arrangements and keep schools informed in a timely manner.

LegCo to debate proposed resolutions relating to conducting remote meetings of Council or committee

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

The Legislative Council (LegCo) will hold a meeting tomorrow (January 19) at 11am in the Chamber of the LegCo Complex. During the meeting, Members will debate two proposed resolutions under Article 75 of the Basic Law and the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance. The two proposed resolutions, to be moved by Ms Starry Lee, seek to authorise that meetings of the Council or a committee may be conducted remotely in accordance with the Rules of Procedure by the means determined by the Council within a specified period. The proposed resolutions are set out in Appendix 1.

Ms Lee will also move a proposed resolution under the Legislative Council Commission Ordinance on the manner of election of members of the Legislative Council Commission. The proposed resolution is set out in Appendix 2.

Meanwhile, Ms Lee will move a proposed resolution under section 34(4) of the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance to extend the period for amending the Prevention and Control of Disease (Use of Vaccines) (Amendment) Regulation 2021, laid on the table of the Council on October 20, 2021, to the meeting of February 16, 2022.

On other Members' motions, Mr Lai Tung-kwok will move a motion on guarding against the importation of COVID-19, preventing its spread on all fronts and resuming quarantine-free travel as soon as possible. The motion is set out in Appendix 3. Mr Dennis Leung, Mr Edward Leung, Ms Yung Hoi-yan, Mr Ma Fung-kwok and Mr Yim Kong will move separate amendments to Mr Lai's motion.

Ms Judy Chan will move a motion on regulating employment agencies for placement of foreign domestic helpers to protect the interests of employers and employees. The motion is set out in Appendix 4. Mr Lee Chun-keung, Mr Ngan Man-yu and Mr Paul Tse will move separate amendments to Ms Chan's motion.

Separately, Mr Edward Leung will ask, under Rule 24(4) of the Rules of Procedure, an urgent oral question concerning measures to immediately improve the management of the Penny's Bay Quarantine Centre. Members will also ask the Government 22 questions on various policy areas, six of which require oral replies.

The agenda of the above meeting can be obtained via the LegCo Website (www.legco.gov.hk). Members of the public can watch or listen to the meeting via the "Webcast" system on the LegCo Website. To observe the proceedings of the meeting at the LegCo Complex, members of the public may call 3919 3399 during office hours to reserve seats.

FEHD continues to take stringent enforcement actions relating to anti-epidemic regulations

A spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said today (January 17) that the FEHD continued to step up its inspections territory wide in the past three days and conducted joint operations with the Police in Central and Western District, Eastern District and Yau Tsim District, so as to take stringent enforcement actions against operators, staff and customers of catering businesses and scheduled premises in defiance of the anti-epidemic regulations. The spokesman again reminded parties concerned to remain vigilant and strictly comply with the requirements and directions under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation). The FEHD will continue to conduct enforcement operations proactively, and urges premises operators not to defy the law.

In the operations over the past three days, the FEHD and the Police inspected a total of 57 catering premises during the joint operations; and the FEHD on its own inspected a total of 1 430 catering premises and 544 other premises. The FEHD initiated procedures on prosecution against operators of 15 catering premises suspected of breaching the requirements under the directions. Among the requirements suspected to have been breached, eight related to mask-wearing, three related to the distance or partition between tables, two related to display of notices concerning mode of operation, one related to ensuring scanning the "LeaveHomeSafe" venue QR code by customers and one related to the maximum number of persons allowed to be seated together at one table. The FEHD also required these premises to take corresponding measures for reducing the risk of transmission. They had to, on the subsequent day of being identified of the irregularities by the enforcement officers, cease selling or supplying food or drink for consumption on the premises from 6pm to 4.59am of the subsequent day, and allow no more than two persons to be seated together at one table, ranging from three, seven to 14 days. During the joint operations, the Police also took enforcement actions, including issuing fixed penalty notices.

If a person responsible for carrying on a catering business contravenes the Regulation, he or she is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, to a

maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months. Persons who are present at any premises of a catering business must comply with directions applicable to them. Non-compliance with the relevant directions would be an offence and offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$10,000. The liability may be discharged by paying a fixed penalty of \$5,000. In addition, for customers in breach of the requirement on the maximum number of persons per table within catering premises, they are liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000 for violating the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Group Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G). For customers not wearing a mask when they are eating or drinking not at a table therein or they are not eating or drinking, they are liable to a fixed penalty of \$5,000 for contravening the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I).

The spokesman stressed that the FEHD will continue to step up law enforcement on catering premises and take stringent enforcement actions against offenders. To minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19, the spokesman strongly appealed to operators and staff members of all premises as well as members of the public to continue to comply with the relevant regulations on prevention and control of disease and observe all prevailing social distancing measures in a persistent manner and fight the virus together.

Transcript of remarks of press conference (with photo/video)

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, held a press conference this afternoon (January 5). Also joining were the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan; the Director of Health, Dr Ronald Lam; the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui; and the Chief Executive of the Hospital Authority, Dr Tony Ko. Following is the transcript of remarks of the press conference.

Reporter: Some English questions. Why not require work from home and suspend schools now? Can you explain the rationale? Also, is forbidding dine-in services only after 6pm enough?

Chief Executive: As I have said at my media stand-up yesterday, in the two years of fighting COVID-19, the most difficult decision for the Chief Executive is to decide what sort of measures to take, having regard to the epidemic situation, the various factors to be considered, and also knowing very well the impact – normally it would be the adverse impact – of the measures that we are going to take, particularly in tightening these social distancing measures. It is not an easy decision. But having regard to the transmissibility of Omicron as we have seen in other parts of the world, the not entirely satisfactory vaccination rate in Hong Kong, and also the latest

public health advice given to me about these cases that they might be related to an imported case but the channel of transmission is not entirely clear, the advice given to me by my colleagues in the public health arena is we are facing a very dire situation of a major community outbreak any time, and that's why we have to take very decisive measures.

Of course, in taking the decisive measures we also have to consider some very genuine situations. You are right that compared with all the drastic measures we have taken previously, there are two measures that we have deliberated very fully this morning but decided that we would not put them in place in exactly the same way as previously. One is for civil servants to work from home. Of course, I would encourage private companies to allow their employees, wherever possible, to work from home, because the ultimate objective is to reduce people flow, to reduce congestion on public transport and hence to reduce the chance of infection. But for civil servants to work from home, our experience is, one, we have a lot of civil servants who have duties to do, and in dealing with this epidemic, there are even more duties for the civil servants to do. If you go to visit one of those places under the "restriction-testing declaration" in a district, in a small area or in a building, we have to mobilise hundreds of civil servants and staff to operate it. So it is not entirely realistic to carve up some of the civil servants who could work from home. Having said that, the Civil Service Bureau will advise the various departments that if departments have staff who could continue to deliver the service without coming back to office, without seeing their customers face-to-face, they will continue to do it. Just like how I will be cancelling a lot of face-to-face meetings. I have cancelled my appearance at the Asian Financial Forum next Monday; I will do an online message to this very important forum held annually. All these are refinements in order to achieve the objective of reducing people flow but without introducing a drastic policy of allowing a certain percentage of civil servants not to come to the office, because that would seriously affect the service to the public. You may remember the situation when postmen were put to work from home, and they couldn't even deliver the essential goods and letters to the people of Hong Kong. That's our consideration of not putting in place the same policy of work from home. I would imagine that some of my civil service colleagues will not be coming back to office because they could meet the requirement of providing service without coming back to office. And even for those who come back to office, they will be asked to come in staggered hours, they will be asked to go out to lunch in staggered hours, which will achieve a similar purpose but without undermining our service to the community.

As far as suspension of face-to-face learning, I mentioned this at my media stand-up yesterday. This is one of the most difficult decisions. I can take a decision to cancel events, dinners and so on, knowing that they will have an impact on the business, but one would not say that they have a very major consequence. But not allowing young students to come to school, not having face-to-face learning, is significantly affecting their health, whether it's their mental health or their physical health. And schools have been highly co-operative in arranging the resumption of these classes for a very long time, and so far they've been working well. So for the time being,

we feel that, for the benefit and the interest of the children – and of course also their parents, because if the kids are not going to school and the parents couldn't look after them, there will be major problems as well – we are not suspending classes. But we will be sending very strong advice to the schools that they will have to be doubly cautious in enforcing all the precautionary measures in looking after their students. Those are the two major considerations in not putting in place the two measures that you have highlighted.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

