

**For information  
on 9 August 2003**

**Brief for Legislative Council  
Report on Measures to Improve  
Environmental Hygiene in Hong Kong**

**PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the final Report (copy attached) issued by Team Clean. The Report summarises the progress made in Phase I of the Team Clean programme; sets out the way forward and timetable for longer-term Phase II measures and explains the mechanism put in place to bring about sustainable environmental hygiene improvement in Hong Kong.

**BACKGROUND**

2. In the wake of SARS, the Chief Executive tasked the Chief Secretary for Administration to set up Team Clean in early May to develop and take forward proposals for entrenching a high level of public and environmental hygiene in Hong Kong. The Team announced its Interim Report in end May, outlining the short-term Phase I measures that can start immediately and the long-term issues to be examined in its Phase II work. The announcement was made by the Chief Secretary for Administration in the Legislative Council. The Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene was briefed and consulted on 2 June. The Team has completed its Phase II study and will release today (9 August) a final report, entitled 'Report on Measures to Improve Environmental Hygiene in Hong Kong'. The Report summarises the progress on Phase I work and sets out recommendations and way forward on the longer-term measures.

## **PROGRESS OF PHASE I MEASURES (CHAPTER 1)**

3. Over the past two months, we have achieved good results in implementing more than 70 Phase I measures under the categories of personal, home and community hygiene.

### **Personal Hygiene**

4. With Members' endorsement, we have increased the fixed penalty for cleanliness offences to \$1,500, starting from 26 June 2003. Stringent enforcement under the 'zero tolerance' approach has helped improve the hygiene of our streets, markets and back lanes.

5. To remind the public of their role to maintain a clean and healthy environment, we have launched a series of publicity and education programmes for the public and specific target groups to raise their awareness of the need for proper hygiene at home and in the community.

### **Home Hygiene**

6. On home hygiene, we have made good progress in drainage inspection in public and private housing. Long-standing problems with drains and pipes have been identified and in many cases rectified. We have taken exceptional steps to clean up unhygienic old tenements. We have also improved the cleanliness of public housing estates (PHEs) through intensive cleansing and building a New Cleansing Culture among residents. To tackle the problem of illegal cooked food hawking in PHEs, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Housing Department, and the Police have launched joint operations and achieved encouraging results.

## **Community Hygiene**

7. As regard community hygiene, we have cleaned up district hygiene blackspots, stepped up cleansing and enforcement in markets, cooked food centres and restaurants as well as cleaned and spruced up public facilities and outdoor furniture, roads, walkways, footpaths and bridges. We have also developed a modality for inter-departmental collaboration to tackle perennial environmental problems (e.g. the eight 'Wan' Streets) based on experience in the previous two months.

8. Public feedback has been positive so far. An opinion survey conducted in mid-July found that 91% of respondents considered Hong Kong to be cleaner than before SARS, while just over 90% considered that the 'zero tolerance' approach to cleanliness and hygiene offences, and the higher \$1,500 fixed penalty have had a deterrent effect. Encouragingly, about 97% of respondents said they would be more willing to keep the environment clean if they found it cleaner than before.

## **PHASE II MEASURES**

9. During our Phase II study, we scrutinised in some depth the long-term proposals raised in the Interim Report. Given that many of them involve larger, fundamental issues, we have had meetings with different groups to listen to their views and suggestions.

10. We have indicated in the final Report the timeline for implementing various proposals. For the few issues that require further consultation, we have endeavoured to present different viewpoints in as objective a manner as possible, setting out, where appropriate, the options available and the direction in which we believe we should be heading. A gist of the measures is set out in the following paragraphs.

## **Personal Hygiene (Chapter 2)**

### ***Penalties for cleanliness offences***

11. The increased penalty of \$1,500 for cleanliness offences, coupled with the 'zero tolerance' approach, has brought quick and visible results. We believe this enhanced enforcement regime will continue to work adequately for first-time, one-off offenders. But for repeat offenders, more stringent measures will be needed.

12. We have considered various options. We believe there is merit in pursuing higher fines and community service orders for repeat offenders. We have decided against criminalising repeat offences (which could include prison terms) as such a move is excessive at this stage. We have also considered the suggestion of publishing offenders' names together with their personal particulars but have decided not to pursue this measure at this stage.

### ***Civic and health education in school***

13. Stronger deterrents are only one way to tackle community hygiene problems, many of which stem from a lack of civic-mindedness and irresponsibility. To tackle the problem at source, we will adopt an integrated approach to strengthen civic and health education in schools.

14. Under the new approach, we will include new elements in school subjects, incorporate civic and health issues into school projects, conduct regular reviews of learning goals for civic responsibility and healthy living, and introduce more relevant life events in moral and civic education. The Education and Manpower Bureau will help schools assess and review their programmes on an annual basis. Students will be given more opportunities to 'learn by doing' through such initiatives as an annual Pledge Day that will encourage a collective school commitment to healthy living and a clean campus and community environment, and involvement in district-based projects to clean up or monitor hygiene blackspots in their areas.

## **Home Hygiene (Chapter 3)**

### ***Building management and maintenance***

15. The biggest problem with building management is the reluctance of the strata-titled holders in older tenements to form Owners' Corporations, or to hire management companies to ensure their buildings are properly maintained. There are about 8 000 tenements in this situation. Despite repeated and concerted efforts by Government to address this problem, the individual owners of apartments in these buildings have failed to take responsibility for the proper management and upkeep of their buildings.

16. There are merits to make it mandatory for property owners to form Owners' Corporations and to appoint building managers to ensure the proper upkeep of their properties. We will put in place a number of support measures to help this process, including encouraging the development of an all-round building management and maintenance industry, recognition of good management and maintenance practices through a building classification system and financial assistance such as loans or matching grants for owners with genuine difficulties meeting the costs of building management and maintenance.

17. The Secretary for Housing, Planning and Lands will consult the public on a package of measures before the end of 2003, with a view for implementation from 2004 onwards, subject to the outcome of public consultation.

### ***Building design***

18. The SARS outbreak at Amoy Gardens prompted a rethink on building design, particularly drainage and ventilation. We have reviewed the current regulations relating to such areas as drainage, plumbing and sanitary fittings and found them to be adequate and on par with international standards. However, problems have arisen as a result

of improper alteration or installation of pipes and fittings, and a lack of regular inspection and maintenance.

19. We will step up controls on the quality and standard of drainage works. This will require certain works such as alterations to common drainage pipes or those involving the sub-division of units, to be carried out by qualified contractors. We will review current standards and technical guidelines for drainage works and amend if necessary. The Buildings Department has also set up a new working group to draw on industry experience in building design issues, with a view to bringing in measures that will help improve environmental hygiene.

### *Urban design*

20. The SARS outbreak also prompted discussions about how the congested nature of our city may have played a role in the transmission of the disease. While we cannot establish a direct relationship between urban design and the spread of SARS, we believe that good urban design can contribute to a healthy lifestyle and environment.

21. We will introduce measures to apply urban design guidelines to improve the general physical environment, particularly in regards to air circulation. Some of the urban design guidelines include the gradation of development height profiles consistent with topography and local character; the provision of breezeways and visual corridors for better aeration of the city and layout planning that allows for more open space.

22. We are also considering the practicality of introducing an air ventilation assessment for future major planning and development proposals. We will consult relevant professional institutes and stakeholders on the standards, scope and mechanism of application for the assessment. In addition, we will reduce development intensity where appropriate and feasible. We will consult the public on issues concerning plot ratio as part of the Stage 3 Public Consultation of the 'Study on Hong Kong 2030: Planning Vision and Strategy'.

### ***Public housing estates***

23. Concerted efforts to clean up hygiene blackspots in public housing estates have brought about a marked effect on general cleanliness in housing estates. A New Cleansing Culture may have sprouted, but we need to make sure it firmly takes root.

24. To build on the good results achieved, and to improve hygiene and living conditions in public housing estates, we have introduced a Marking Scheme for tenancy enforcement and developed a new inter-departmental modality to tackle the illegal cooked food hawking problem. We will extend the Drainage Ambassador Scheme to estates which have not been covered under Team Clean Phase I efforts and enhance urban and building design to provide more open space, better ventilation, more greenery and ways to rejuvenate older housing estates.

### **Community Hygiene (Chapter 4)**

#### ***Public markets***

25. During Team Clean Phase I, contractors were employed to thoroughly clean and disinfect the common areas of markets and individual stall areas. This free service will end in December. To maintain this cleaning work, we propose to impose a tenancy condition that market stalls be cleaned on a particular day of each month. Failure to comply will be regarded as a breach of tenancy condition. We expect the first cleansing day to be held in November.

26. The enforcement regime for market tenants will be streamlined, and there will be a more rigorous enforcement of legislation and tenancy conditions. A demerit points system will be introduced. Market tenants who accumulate a certain number of points within a 12-month period will have their tenancy terminated. Tenants whose

tenancies have been revoked will also be prevented from bidding for others stalls for one year. We will clearly delineate the circumstances for prosecution and the issue of verbal warnings. Tenancy conditions of markets and cooked food stalls will be reviewed with a view to removing those conditions that replicate existing legal provisions.

### *Licensed food premises*

27. We have identified a number of problems with the current licensing and regulatory regime. These include inadequate licensing requirements (e.g. food factory licences), insufficient control of unauthorised building works (e.g. water cooling towers, exhaust fans), abuse of the provisional licensing system, an ineffective sanction system, a lack of responsibility for hygiene offences committed by staff and constraints on publicising unhygienic food premises.

28. We have proposed a number of measures to address these issues. These include: tightening licensing requirements for food factories; refusal to issue a new licence or allow a licence transfer until all unauthorised building works have been removed from a premises; cancellation of a provisional licence for non-compliance of requirements relating to sanitary hardware; making licensees responsible (under the Demerit Points System) for hygiene breaches committed by their staff.

29. We also propose to widely publicise repeat offenders by publishing in local newspapers and other avenues the names and photographs of convicted restaurants or shops, including photographs shown in court as evidence of the offences committed.

30. We will offer an incentive scheme to help restaurant and food shop owners refurbish their kitchens and toilets and install other facilities such as food storage cabinets or dish-washing machines.

31. To recognise high standards, and to help consumers make informed choices, we will bring forward the introduction of the Open Categorisation Scheme to July 2004 and publish hygiene grades from

January 2005. Premises will be graded according to set criteria and will be required to post the hygiene grading at a conspicuous location on their premises.

### *Avian influenza*

32. Every day, more than 100 000 live poultry are transported through the streets of Hong Kong to 820 retailers. Hong Kong's love affair with live poultry carries serious public health risks as the H5N1 avian influenza virus is a known danger to humans. There is a possibility that this virus could mutate further to create a dire public health threat to Hong Kong. We need urgent and resolute action to reduce contacts between humans and poultry, and thus minimise the risk of an outbreak of avian influenza. In doing so, we will need to balance public health needs with those of people involved in the live poultry trade.

33. To tackle this issue, we have so far identified four broad options: a complete ban on the retailing and rearing of live poultry; a ban on the retailing of live poultry, but the sale of chilled or frozen poultry; a ban on the retailing of live poultry, but the sale of 'warm' slaughtered poultry; the segregation of poultry from customers at the retail level. We are open to further ideas and will begin public consultation on the matter from December 2003. Depending on public reaction, we expect to announce a decision on the way forward in 2004.

### *Dengue fever and other mosquito-transmitted diseases*

34. A spate of cases in Ma Wan alerted us to the problem of dengue fever becoming endemic in Hong Kong. Enhanced preventive measures to stop mosquito breeding have proven successful, with a drop in the monthly ovitrap index from 35.6% to 16.8% year-on-year. We will build on the existing effort.

35. Enhanced monitoring is now taking place in selected housing estates. This will help gather data that can be used to highlight

the importance of anti-mosquito measures in the home. Laboratory testing will be carried out to assess the infection risks of mosquitoes carrying dengue viruses. This will enable us to upgrade risk reduction strategies. We have also enhanced co-operation on information sharing between health authorities in Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland to provide an early alert to dengue fever cases in our respective jurisdictions.

### *Miscellaneous issues*

36. Miscellaneous issues cover such problems as water seepage, excessive rubbish, unhygienic worksites and smelly village toilets.

37. Water seepage in apartments can be a complicated matter involving a number of causes that may be quite difficult to trace. The current method for dealing with water seepage can involve up to three Government departments (Food and Environmental Hygiene, Buildings and Water Supplies) and take more than three months to complete the investigation process, even though we still fail in most cases to identify the causes of the seepage. We propose to set up a Joint Office between the Buildings Department and Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to tackle the problem. Because of staff constraints, investigations may be outsourced to private surveyors to provide a more effective and efficient service. We will also publish a comprehensive set of guidelines to help the public better deal with water seepage problems.

38. Excessive rubbish can be a health hazard as well as a nuisance. We will not tolerate excessive accumulation of rubbish. For severe cases, we will take immediate action to remove the refuse and prosecute, where possible, those responsible. We will also, where necessary, provide counselling to those people who have an abnormal fixation for collecting rubbish and junk.

39. Construction site management need to ensure that their work areas do not have an adverse effect on the neighbouring environment.

We will strengthen control measures to ensure site cleanliness and the elimination of mosquito breeding sites. Poor performance or non-compliance will be recorded in a contractor's performance record. Contractors who repeatedly commit public health offences will be prevented from bidding for government contracts for a specified time. Conviction records will also be taken into consideration for tender assessment purposes.

40. Aqua privies are village-type dry latrines. There are more than 500 of them in the New Territories and outlying islands. They are often malodorous and unhygienic. To improve public hygiene, we will accelerate the conversion of about 100 high-use aqua privies to flushing toilets with proper hand-washing facilities, starting from next financial year.

### **Sustainability (Chapter 5)**

41. All of our proposed measures will not bring lasting impact unless we are able to build on and sustain the momentum generated during Phase I of Team Clean's efforts. To do this we need to tackle old problems with new methods, boost community involvement and public education, and ensure proper institutional arrangements are put in place.

42. We will achieve this by reinforcing our 'zero tolerance' approach, streamlining enforcement procedures, cutting red tape, breaking traditional enforcement boundaries, establishing an enhanced cost recovery mechanism and strengthening co-ordination among departments by empowering district administrations to devise their own measures to deal with specific problems. The details are set out in Chapter 5 of the Report.

43. To make community involvement a driving force of sustained environmental hygiene improvements in Hong Kong, we are looking at ways to enhance current work on civic education and will make special efforts to harness the energy, enthusiasm and ideas of our youth – the civic leaders of tomorrow. We will develop special

education programmes on good hygiene practices for new arrivals, domestic helpers, street users and the users of public facilities. The Home Affairs Bureau has consulted the community on the most appropriate way to commemorate Hong Kong's battle against SARS and will submit a report on various options to the Chief Executive in August.

44. To encourage and foster a sense of community pride, we will continue to form volunteer District Hygiene Squads (more than 105 have been set up in the past two months) to play an important role in the upkeep of neighbourhood hygiene. These squads will carry out such duties as inspecting and monitoring hygiene conditions, identifying problematic areas for follow up action and spreading Team Clean messages. We will continue to conduct the monthly cleaning exercise in each district. Closed-circuit televisions will be installed with local community support in hygiene blackspots to find out how, why and by whom persistent hygiene problems are caused. We will also launch a Community Cleanliness Index to benchmark hygiene conditions in each of the 18 districts and track subsequent efforts to maintain or improve district hygiene conditions.

45. We will, in consultation with district bodies, implement district revitalisation schemes to help shop operators comply with relevant laws and regulations, tidy up sites and improve pedestrian access. Loans will be offered to help them bear costs of repairs and refurbishment.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

46. We will put in place various institutional arrangements to facilitate implementation of Phase II measures, to monitor and give effect to inter-departmental co-ordination and to maintain momentum in the community, and within government, for environmental hygiene improvements.

47. The Home Affairs Department will play a central co-ordinating role for inter-departmental efforts in district hygiene improvement, as well as community involvement and civic education. Responsibility for the delivery of Phase II measures will lie with the relevant Principal Officials. The Secretary for Home Affairs will present quarterly progress reports to the Policy Committee led by the Chief Secretary for Administration, on the progress of Phase II measures. And for the next six months, as a transitional arrangement, the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office will continue to monitor the overall implementation of Team Clean measures.

48. The implementation timetable and responsible bureaux and departments are set out clearly in the Summary of Phase II Measures in the Report.

Team Clean  
Chief Secretary for Administration's Office  
9 August 2003