

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. FC11/09-10
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/F/1/2

Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

**Minutes of the 24th meeting
held at the Legislative Council Chamber
on Tuesday, 14 July 2009, at 8:30 am**

Members present:

Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP (Chairman)
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, BBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH

Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHAN Hak-kan
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP
Hon Tanya CHAN
Dr Hon Priscilla LEUNG Mei-fun
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP

Members absent:

Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP
Hon CHIM Pui-chung
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Yuk-man
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

Public officers attending:

Professor K C CHAN, SBS, JP	Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
Mr Stanley YING, JP	Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)
Ms Bernadette LINN, JP	Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)1

Ms Elsie YUEN	Principal Executive Officer (General), Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (The Treasury Branch)
Dr York Y N CHOW, GBS, JP	Secretary for Food and Health
Ms Olivia NIP, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Mr Francis HO	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food)2
Mr WONG Kai-tat	Chief Engineer/Mainland South, Drainage Services Department
Ms CHU Lan-ying	Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Operations)3
Mr Andrew TSANG	Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2)
Mr Ricky CHUI, JP	Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Finance)
Mr FUNG Man-lok	Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth and Corrections)
Ms NGAR Yuen-ngor	Acting Senior Country Park Officer (North-west), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Mr FUNG Kwok-ming	General Manager/Services, Marine Department

Clerk in attendance:

Mrs Constance LI	Assistant Secretary General 1
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Staff in attendance:

Ms Anita SIT	Chief Council Secretary (1)4
Mr Simon CHEUNG	Senior Council Secretary (1)5
Ms Alice CHEUNG	Senior Legislative Assistant (1)1
Mr Frankie WOO	Legislative Assistant (1)2

Item No. 1 - FCR(2009-10)38

HEAD 39 – DRAINAGE SERVICES DEPARTMENT

- **Subhead 700 General non-recurrent**

New Item "Additional cleansing of underground drains and sewers"

HEAD 49 – FOOD AND ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE DEPARTMENT

- **Subhead 700 General non-recurrent**

New Item "Special improvement in environmental hygiene to combat human swine influenza"

HEAD 63 – HOME AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

- **Subhead 700 General non-recurrent**

New Item "Environmental hygiene improvement and community involvement projects"

HEAD 95 – LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

- **Subhead 700 General non-recurrent**

New Item "Strengthening cleansing and disinfection services and promoting human swine influenza precautionary measures in the leisure and cultural venues"

HEAD 170 – SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT

- **Subhead 700 General non-recurrent**

New Item "Strengthening cleansing service of welfare service units"

Mr Fred LI, Chairman of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, reported that the Administration had consulted the Panel on 22 June 2009 on the proposed project to step up environmental hygiene to combat human swine influenza (HSI). However, as the Administration had not provided sufficient information on the proposal, the Panel could not take a view on the proposal. The Panel had requested the Administration to provide supplementary information which was subsequently circulated to the Panel.

2. On behalf of the Democratic Party (DP), Mr Fred LI said that he noted that under the present proposal, the Administration had reduced the number of Health Ambassadors who would have more specific duties. Given that the Administration's proposal would create jobs to ease the unemployment problem, Members belonging to DP would support the proposal. He urged that the Administration's cleansing work should have sustainable effects on environmental hygiene beyond the proposed one-year period, particularly in respect of the clean-up of the environmental hygiene blackspots.

3. The Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) advised that the purpose of the proposed cleansing services was to further arouse public awareness of healthy living and environmental hygiene by setting an example on the desirable hygiene standard.

Although the timeframe for the proposal was one year, the Administration might incorporate certain cleansing activities under the proposal into the regular work programmes of the relevant departments if necessary. As regards the environmental hygiene blackspots within private land, the Administration would continue conducting inspections and take enforcement actions against parties responsible for causing the hygiene problem.

4. Mr Vincent FANG said that he had reservations about the need for providing an additional provision of nearly \$300 million for the proposed cleansing services, which should be part of the regular work of the relevant Government departments. He noted that under the current proposal, the cleansing programmes of Marine Department (MD) and Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had been taken out from the original proposal submitted to the Panel in order to reduce the amount of additional provision sought, but funding would still be provided to MD and AFCD through the delegated authority vested with the Administration. He considered that the Administration only used HSI as an excuse to seek resources for an one-off programme which would not have lasting effect on the environmental hygiene in Hong Kong. He was concerned that the Administration might ask the "users", such as the wholesale dealers operating in the fish markets, to meet part of the cleansing costs.

5. SFH explained that all cleansing and disinfection services, including those of MD and AFCD, were extra work for which additional resources would be required. As for the cleansing work of MD and AFCD, the Administration had decided to meet the additional expenditure by way of the delegated funding authority. The Legislative Council (LegCo) would be informed of the progress and outcome of the cleansing work.

6. On the cleansing work to be performed by AFCD, the Acting Senior Country Park Officer (North-west), Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department advised that AFCD aimed to further enhance the hygiene of three government wholesale food markets to prevent HSI and set cleanliness standard for staff and food operators to follow. The Government would absorb the additional cleansing costs involved and had no plan to increase the market rental to meet the relevant costs. Mr Vincent FANG considered that the extra work could be absorbed by the existing manpower. He pointed out that there were media reports about the staff of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) not performing their duties during working hours. SFH clarified that the staff in the media reports were drivers responsible for transporting the FEHD staff to the workplace, and they were at that time engaged in sporting activities while waiting for the next driving task. The Assistant Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Operations)3 (AD(Op)3/FEHD) added that the new funding provision would be used to improve hygiene condition in public markets, public toilets, streets and rear lanes as well as to clean up environmental hygiene blackspots by increasing the frequency of cleansing services. Another objective was to educate the general public to assist in improving the general hygiene condition.

7. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said he supported the Administration's funding proposal and believed that it was a right direction for the territory to improve environmental hygiene in its fight against HSI. He noted that 21 of the 105 environmental hygiene blackspots had been cleared by the end of 30 June 2009, and asked when all the blackspots would be cleared. He also requested the Administration to regularly report the work progress to the relevant LegCo Panel. Referring to the case that a newly-arrived Filipino domestic helper was in critical condition after contracting HSI, he urged the Administration to step up healthcare education for the 200 000 foreign domestic helpers, through collaborative efforts with the embassies of the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, such as holding promotion activities in popular places frequented by the domestic helpers.

8. SFH advised that it was the Administration's plan to clear the remaining 84 blackspots in the year to come and a progress report would be submitted to the relevant Panel about nine months after securing funding approval for LegCo. On healthcare education for foreign domestic helpers, pamphlets and other education materials in different languages would be distributed to the various organisations providing services to foreign domestic helpers. AD(Ops)3/FEHD supplemented that foreign domestic helpers were one of the target groups of the public health education programmes under the current proposal. Three promotion and publicity programmes on anti-HSI and hygiene message would be held in Chater Garden, Kowloon Park and Sha Tin Park for foreign domestic helpers. Similar programmes would also be arranged in popular places frequented by new arrivals and ethnic minorities.

9. Ms Miriam LAU said that Members belonging to the Liberal Party (LP) in principle supported the funding proposal which aimed to improve the overall hygiene standard in Hong Kong. LP's concern was whether public resources would be put to the best use. Noting that part of the funding sought would be used for increasing the frequency of cleansing and disinfection services, Ms LAU said that while such additional work should normally be absorbed by the existing manpower, employment of additional staff would be acceptable if the Administration's intention was to create jobs to ease the unemployment problem. She enquired about the number of jobs that would be created under this proposal. As regards the duties of the 106 Health Ambassadors to be employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Ms LAU asked whether these Health Ambassadors would assist in the actual cleansing work apart from advising venue users to maintain environmental hygiene at the venues. Ms LAU also asked whether there would be any overlapping of work among the five departments, such as the involvement of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and FEHD in the clean-up of private buildings.

10. SFH said that around 2 000 additional workers would be engaged under this proposal, including 1 000 to be employed by contractors of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and another 1 000 by the four Government departments. There would be good coordination at the district level to prevent overlapping of

cleansing services carried out by different departments. As regards the need for FEHD to acquire additional manpower for the cleansing work, AD(Ops)3/FEHD advised that the cleansing and disinfection services for public toilets had been contracted out, and the number of workers, frequency of cleansing and hourly rate were specified in the service agreements. If additional service hours were required to increase the frequency of cleansing services, additional cleansing workers would be required. The whole package would involve the creation of 558 jobs. Concerning the one-off clean-up services for common areas of old tenement buildings without owners' corporations, AD(Ops)3/FEHD and the Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2) (AD(2)/HAD) said that their departments would work out the division of labour to avoid duplication of work. The Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Finance) advised that the Health Ambassadors would be employed to provide guidance to users, especially children, in the 106 leisure and cultural venues on health education, such as the importance of hand-washing and avoidance of close physical contacts for the prevention of HSI.

11. Ms Miriam LAU expressed concern about the sustainability of hygiene improvement at blackspots. She also suggested that the Health Ambassadors should extend their health education services to other areas such as restaurants and buildings. SFH responded that there would be follow-up inspections to the blackspots and enforcement actions would be taken if warranted. He took note of Ms LAU's views on the role of the Health Ambassadors.

12. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that while the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions supported the proposal to clean up Hong Kong and to create more employment opportunities, he believed that the Administration should come up with a long-term plan for the environmental hygiene blackspots, such as charging the owners concerned for the clean-up services. He also enquired about the number of jobs that would be created by Social Welfare Department (SWD) under the cleansing programme. He urged SWD to monitor the wages and working hours of the workers hired by contractors. He considered that with the additional funding, the Administration should be able to expand the cleansing services for singleton elderly households by engaging more workers for providing such services.

13. On the problem of the environmental hygiene blackspots, SFH advised that some blackspots were located within private lands. While the Administration was willing to clean up these areas to arouse general awareness towards environmental hygiene, the owners themselves had the responsibility to keep their properties tidy. After the clean-up exercise, the Administration would continue to inspect these blackspots, and take enforcement actions alongside public education to sustain cleanliness of these areas. He took note of Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's suggestion of charging the owners concerned for the clean-up services at environmental hygiene blackspots.

14. Responding to Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, the Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth and Corrections) (AD/SWD) said that while the 1 800 welfare service

units involved would be allowed to either outsource the cleansing service to contractors or to hire extra hands to handle the service, it was estimated that the current proposal might be able to provide about 1 000 jobs. Regarding outsourced contracts, he advised that the relevant Government departments and NGOs would endeavour to ensure that the contractors would comply with the requirements in the service contracts for protection of workers' interests.

15. As regards providing cleansing services for more singleton elderly households, SFH advised that with the additional funding, the departments concerned could have some flexibility in hiring more workers to provide such services. AD(2)/HAD advised that through District Councils (DCs), NGOs and community networks, the Administration had identified about 20 000 singleton elderly households. Apart from carrying out cleansing work in these households, opportunity would be taken to visit and educate the elderly on the ways to maintain household and environmental hygiene.

16. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that he supported the objective of the proposal, which aimed at stepping up environmental hygiene to help contain the spread of HSI and create employment opportunities. He commented that the Administration's paper for the Panel had not provided sufficient information and he hoped that by setting out specific objectives of the cleansing work, it would ensure cost-effectiveness of the work in promoting environmental hygiene and health habits.

17. SFH took note of Mr TAM's views and said the Administration aimed at arousing public awareness towards environmental hygiene. He was glad that with the efforts made by all sides, the number of influenza cases during the peak months had reduced in comparison with previous years.

18. Mr Alan LEONG said that compared to the Administration's paper provided to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene in June 2009, the paper for the Finance Committee (FC) had provided more information on the proposed programmes. However, as the requested funding of \$300 million was a large sum of public funds, it was necessary for FC to have a good understanding of the objectives of the proposal, the arrangements for coordinating the cleansing work among different departments and the criteria for evaluating the outcome. Mr LEONG also asked about the format and contents of the progress report the Administration would submit to the Panel in nine months' time. He considered that the progress report should enable members to effectively assess the actual achievements of the cleansing services, by providing information on the uses of resources by different departments and the extent the objectives were achieved. He was also concerned about the possible duplication of work as FEHD and HAD would provide one-off clean-up services to common areas of private buildings without management bodies, while SWD financed some 1 800 welfare service units to strengthen general cleansing services and enhance environmental hygiene.

19. In response to Mr Alan LEONG's concerns, SFH said that the progress report to be submitted to LegCo after nine months would provide the work progress of individual departments in cleaning up the environment hygiene blackspots, an assessment of the cleanliness conditions of the problematic areas, and also an account of the use of resources by different departments. He assured members that there would be close coordination among departments at the district level to avoid duplication of work, especially in respect of the one-off cleansing service in private buildings without management bodies. AD(2)/HAD and AD(Ops)3/FEHD advised that HAD and FEHD would be responsible for cleaning up the common areas of 1 500 and 5 000 private buildings respectively, and the two departments would agree on the buildings to be serviced by the respective departments to prevent overlapping of cleansing services. AD/SWD added that the cleansing services coordinated by SWD were confined to welfare service units of NGOs, and these services would not overlap with those of HAD and FEHD.

20. Mr KAM Nai-wai recalled that the Administration had introduced the Community Cleanliness Index (CCI) shortly after the SARS to monitor the cleanliness level of individual districts. The index was no longer published without much consultation. He considered it necessary to resume publishing the CCI to facilitate public monitoring of the environmental hygiene conditions in districts. He also enquired whether it was possible to incorporate some of the additional cleansing services under the funding proposal, such as the increased use of high pressure hot water cleaners for street washing, into the regular cleansing programme to sustain the impetus.

21. AD(2)/HAD took note of Mr KAM's views. He explained that the CCI was first introduced in 2004. The index reflected that there had been improvement of cleanliness between 2004 and 2006 and the cleanliness level had stabilised after 2006. In a review conducted in 2008, it was decided that the CCI should be discontinued after having achieved its objective. On the use of high pressure hot water cleaners for street washing, AD(Ops)3/FEHD advised that the use of such equipment had been included in some of FEHD's street cleansing services contracts and would be extended to all gradually. At present, depending on the location, street washing was carried out on a weekly or bi-weekly basis by FEHD.

22. Dr Joseph LEE considered that the Administration might consider re-activating the CCI to measure the effectiveness of this cleansing project which cost some \$300 million. This would also enable DCs and community leaders to participate in monitoring the cleanliness of their own districts. Dr LEE also expressed concern about the cleansing work in 1 800 welfare service units coordinated by SWD which would be done through the NGOs. He asked how such work would be monitored to ensure that the public funds were spent properly.

23. SFH responded that FEHD and other relevant departments would conduct inspections to the sites where cleansing work was carried out and assess the effectiveness of such work. As regards the suggestion of re-activating the CCI, the

Administration would consult DCs for their views. On the cleansing services for the 1 800 welfare service units, AD/SWD pointed out that SWD attached great importance to preventing the spread of HSI, since a large number of service users were vulnerable groups such as small children and elderly people. In May and June 2009, SWD had provided a total of \$6,000 to each service unit for acquiring cleansing equipment in the fight against HSI. Additional resources were now being sought for carrying out enhanced cleansing work in these welfare service units. On the disbursement of funds, the additional allocations would be handed out half yearly to the NGOs and those which failed to provide the desired deliverables in the first six months would not be disbursed with the funds in the second half year. The NGOs would be required to submit progress reports to SWD for scrutiny. AD/SWD further advised that there was a "claw back" mechanism for regular subventions but not for one-off allocations. Nevertheless, effective control measures such as surprise inspections to the concerned service units would be carried out.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration has advised after the meeting that after having considered Members' suggestions, when releasing the funds to the NGOs, SWD will reserve the right to recover the funding released if its use is found not complying with the designated purpose.)

24. Given the rapid spread of HSI and the likelihood of a second-wave attack, Mr Jeffrey LAM said that he supported the Administration's efforts in enhancing the cleansing and hygiene work in the territory's fight against HSI. He was disappointed that there seemed to be no long-term solution to the problem of environmental hygiene blackspots. He enquired whether it was possible to absorb the proposed cleansing services into the regular work programme for the concerned Government departments.

25. SFH responded that it was not known when the first-wave attack of HSI would end, but the second-wave attack was generally believed to arrive in around December 2009 or January 2010. It was therefore necessary to take additional precautionary measures against the attacks. He acknowledged that environmental hygiene blackspots constituted a difficult problem, particularly if the blackspots were within private lands. Nevertheless, the Administration had decided to clean up all the blackspots identified by FEHD in collaboration of DCs in the next 12 months, and would review what sustainable measures could be formulated to tackle the problem. SFH took note of Mr Jeffrey LAM's request for providing proposals to LegCo in this regard.

26. Dr Priscilla LEUNG welcomed the Administration's funding proposal. She considered that in addition to the cleansing work, the Administration should examine the causes leading to the environmental hygiene blackspots. She suggested setting up a public hotline to enable the public to report hygiene hazards requiring immediate attention. Pointing out that not many foreign domestic helpers seemed to be aware that a Pilipino domestic helper was gravely ill due to the attack of HSI, she urged the Administration to step up relevant health education for them.

27. SFH responded that there were already hotlines for members of the public to report matters on health and environmental hygiene. The Administration would continue to liaise with DCs and local residents to enlist their assistance in reporting environmental hygiene blackspots in their respective districts and in eliminating the blackspots. As for foreign domestic helpers, he believed that apart from the embassies and concerned organizations, employers should also bring the latest development of HSI and proper preventive measures to the helpers' attention.

28. Ms Cyd HO criticised that the Administration's various cleansing services were only able to provide short-term employment for a rather limited number of people. She said that the proposal of pan-democrats was to provide cleansing services for 6 500 blocks of private buildings without owners' corporations for a period of two years, which would benefit some 3 000 workers for a longer period of time. While she supported printing multi-language leaflets on health and hygiene problems, she urged that the additional provision being sought should be used for items directly related to the cleansing services and not on souvenirs or ceremonies. She also requested the Administration to consider increasing frequency of cleansing work in private buildings from one time to four times for a continued period of one year, in order to sustain the impact of the cleansing work and provide an incentive for the residents to work together for a decent living environment.

29. SFH pointed out that the main objective of the additional cleansing work was to serve as a stimulus to arouse public awareness and sense of responsibility in promoting personal and environmental hygiene in the face of HSI. An integral part of the funding would be used for employing cleansing workers. AD(2)/HAD supplemented that District Offices of HAD would liaise with the respective DCs on the contents and budgets of promotional activities to guard against wasting public resources. Specific programmes such as seminars on how to maintain personal and environmental hygiene for the general public would be organised. As regards the clean-up for buildings without owners' corporations, the operation would be one-off for educating the owners concerned.

30. The Chairman put the item to vote. The Committee approved the proposal.

31. The meeting was adjourned at 10:06 am.