

LegCo Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Reference Information on the Operation of the Pest Control Section

On 23 November 2008, the Hong Kong Food and Environmental Hygiene Department Staff Rights Union (the Union) made a submission to the Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene, expressing their views on the operation of the Pest Control Section under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). This paper provides for members' reference supplementary information relating to the outsourced services mentioned in the Union's submission.

(1) Resources Allocated to Environmental Hygiene

The FEHD's recurrent expenditures on cleansing and pest control for 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09 were \$1.8 billion, \$1.86 billion and \$1.98 billion respectively. The increase in expenditures over the years reflects the importance the Department has attached to this service area. As for supervisory manpower, the Department has recently completed an internal structure review for the Pest Control Section and intended to increase the number of Foreman grade staff to enhance front-line inspection duties. We would like to reiterate that the review will not affect the front-line services. The 670 in-house pest control staff (including over 400 Workmen II) and 1 400 contractors' workers will all remain in service. We will continue to enhance the environmental hygiene services by optimizing resources allocated.

(2) Monitoring of Service Contractors

FEHD has put in place a contract management mechanism, including laid down operation manuals and guidelines, to monitor the performance of service contractors. Routine monitoring is carried out by district contract management staff. They will inspect regularly the cleanliness conditions of streets,

public toilets and major refuse collection points, check attendance records of the contractors' staff, conduct random checks on the performance of contractors' pest control roving teams as well as on other services and facilities as necessary, such as requiring the pest control service contractors to submit relevant delivery note / invoice / receipt on each and every delivery consignment of rodenticide / pesticide from the suppliers showing the total quantity, shelf-life and any other technical information of the rodenticides and pesticides.

The Administration is very concerned about wage protection for the staff of service contractors. Since 2004, there have been provisions in government contracts requiring that the wages of workers employed by service contractors be set at market level. To strengthen monitoring of service contractors, FEHD has set up in September 2005 a Central Investigation Team (CIT) to investigate complaints on breach of employment commitments by service contractors and a public complaint hotline (telephone no.: 2867 5747). Since the establishment of CIT, the number of complaint cases has decreased from 16 in September 2005 to one in November 2008.

Furthermore, since October 2006, the Department has not found any breach of employment commitment on the part of contractors that warrants the issue of "Notice of Default in Employment Commitment" which attracts demerit points. This shows that the problem of exploitation of workers by contractors has improved significantly. The Department will remain vigilant and take appropriate measures to prevent unauthorised deduction of workers' wages or other irregularities.

(3) Special Support Services Provided by Service Contractors

At present, FEHD employs about 3 200 Workmen II and about 7 700 staff are employed by its service contractors. Together, they carry out day-to-day environmental hygiene duties and also collaborate in providing special support services to the community. For example, FEHD sets up a total of 14 fair sites at different locations in the territory on Lunar New Year's Eve

every year to provide festivity service to the public. Starting from 2000, the division of labour has been that on the day following the event, FEHD staff are responsible for cleaning up the fair site at Victoria Park while staff of the contractors are responsible for cleaning up the other 13 venues. The number of workers deployed by the contractors every year was about 500. This mode of operation has worked well over the years, and staff of both the Department and its service contractors have worked diligently to restore cleanliness of the venues in a short time for use by the public.

Hong Kong has successfully hosted the Olympic Equestrian Games in this summer. For the weeks before and after the events, pest control services inside the two equestrian venues at Sha Tin and North Districts were provided by service contractors while pest control work outside the venues was undertaken by in-house workmen. The division of labour had been clear with visible results.

In view of the avian influenza incident in June this year, FEHD needed to mount a live poultry culling operation at more than 400 retail outlets in the territory. Both departmental workmen and contractors' workers worked closely together to clean up all the poultry stalls in FEHD markets, remove and dispose of the culled poultry carcasses. The operation was carried out throughout the night and completed smoothly in the early morning. The overall performance of the contractors' staff was satisfactory.

(4) Government's Position on Outsourcing

It is Government's established policy that the private sector should participate in the delivery of public services as far as practicable. To take full advantage of the skills, innovation and flexibility of the private sector to provide more and better services to the public, bureaux and departments will keep under regular review the mode of delivery of services. Only when it is established that the service could not be contracted out to a

private service provider or must be undertaken by civil servants would civil servants be engaged to meet such needs.

The Department considers the existing mode of service delivery by engaging both departmental staff and employees of its service contractors has been working satisfactorily. The Department considers that there is no need to lay down any rigid target ratio for contracting out. The Department is actively reviewing the deployment of and need for Workmen II in the delivery of services. Requirement, if any, will first be met through in-service recruitment, where necessary, approval from the Civil Service Bureau for open recruitment will be sought in accordance with existing procedures to meet service needs.

Food and Health Bureau
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
December 2008