

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Home Affairs

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 10 July 2009

Staff deployment and management of public swimming pools

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the management of public swimming pools and gives an account of past discussions held by Legislative Council (LegCo) Members on the subject.

Background

2. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) manages a total of 37 public swimming pool complexes in Hong Kong. In each of the complexes, there can be swimming pools of different types such as main pools, secondary pools, teaching/training pools, fun/leisure pools and diving pools. These swimming pools are either non-heated or heated. Non-heated pools are open during April to October and closed during November to March when annual maintenance takes place. Heated pools (indoor and outdoor) are open throughout the year, except during the periods when annual maintenance takes place. The maintenance periods usually fall in April and May or September and October each year when there is a lower demand for heated pools. In 2007-2008, the number of attendance at LCSD swimming pools was 9.1 million.

3. According to LCSD, it employs some 800 regular lifeguards and 850 seasonal lifeguards in 2009, of whom some 550 regular lifeguards as well as 600 seasonal lifeguards are deployed for swimming pools. The number of rescue, fatal, give a hand (e.g. cramps, exhaustion) and accident cases in public swimming pools during the period from 2006-2008, as presented in LCSD's website, are detailed in the table below -

Case	2006	2007	2008
Rescue case	121	123	186
Fatal case	0	0	2
Give a hand case	1 389	1 488	1 987
Accident case	352	329	413

Audit reviews on the management of public swimming pools

4. The Reports of the Audit Commission (Audit) from 2004 to 2008 have raised a number of issues relating to the management and staff deployment of public swimming pools. Key observations and recommendations made by the Audit are as follows.

Maintenance of heated swimming pools

5. Of the 37 swimming pool complexes, 16 have heated pools. Audit found that in 2007-2008, it took an average of 60 days for the maintenance of these heated pools. To enhance the services provided to the public, Audit considered that the maintenance periods could be shortened to 51 days, and recommended that LCSD should make efforts in collaboration with the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to shorten the duration for such maintenance as far as possible (Chapter 10 on "Provision of recreation and sports services" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 51, October 2008). The Administration responded that LCSD would work with ArchSD and EMSD to try to shorten the duration of the maintenance of heated pools.

Enhanced supervisory inspection of swimming pools

6. In order to improve the hygiene and cleanliness of swimming pools, LCSD revised in September 2005 the Inspection Guidelines to provide more frequent supervisory inspections of swimming pools in accordance with the schedule below -

Supervisory staff	Inspection frequency
Chief Leisure Manager	Once a month
District Leisure Manager (DLM)/Deputy DLM (Note)	Once a week
Assistant DLM	Once a week

Note: Deputy DLMs can conduct supervisory inspections on swimming pools on behalf of the DLMs

7. Audit found that most of the supervisory staff of the four selected swimming pools did not conduct the required number of inspection in accordance with the revised Guidelines. It recommended that LCSD should review its departmental guidelines on the enhanced supervisory inspection of swimming pools, taking into account the latest assessments of the hygiene and cleanliness of the swimming pools. Pending completion of the review, LCSD should ensure that supervisory inspections of swimming pools were carried out and inspection reports were prepared in accordance with the departmental guidelines (Chapter 9 on "Outsourcing of services in the Leisure and Cultural Services Department" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 49, October 2007). The Administration advised that LCSD would review the guidelines on the enhanced supervisory inspection of swimming pools, particularly on the inspection frequencies during the winter season.

Provision of lifeguards

8. To cope with additional demand for lifesaving service during the swimming season from April to October, LCSD employs non-core lifeguards (i.e. those on non-civil-service contract terms on a monthly or daily basis) to supplement its core lifeguards (i.e. those on permanent establishment or full-year contract terms). Audit recommended, among others, that LCSD should (a) ensure that the overall number of core lifeguards employed was kept close to the optimal size (i.e. at half of the full manpower requirement for lifeguards during the peak swimming months); (b) maintain a core to non-core lifeguard ratio of no less than 1:1 at individual aquatic venues throughout the year; (c) critically review the provision of lifeguards at the swimming pool complexes on the basis of patronage level and make the necessary adjustments; and (d) ensure that surplus lifeguards were gainfully employed during the winter months when most of the beaches and swimming pools were closed (Chapter 7 on "Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 42, March 2004). The Administration generally agreed with the Audit's recommendations.

9. In its response to the Public Accounts Committee of LegCo in 2006, the Administration further advised that LCSD would regularly review the overall minimum core to non-core lifeguard ratio to ensure cost-effective deployment of lifeguards while not compromising water safety. Under the winter works programmes 2005-2006, LCSD had deployed surplus lifeguards to undertake various duties, such as performing lifesaving duties in those aquatic venues which were still open in winter, attending training courses, performing first aid duties at sports grounds and conducting talks to school students for publicising water safety etc. This apart, the lifeguards had also taken turn to clear time-off accumulated during the peak swimming season and vacation leave.

Questions raised by LegCo Members at Council meetings

Recruitment and deployment of lifeguards

10. Members raised questions regarding the provision of lifeguard services at public swimming pools and beaches under the management of LCSD at the Council meetings on 15 June 2005 and 7 May 2008, including the qualifications and pay levels of and the staffing complement for lifeguards. They also requested the Administration to provide updated statistics on rescue/drowning cases in the respective years, and enquired how LCSD would ensure an adequate number of on-duty lifeguards to stand in for those who took unscheduled leave.

11. In response, the Administration advised that -

- (a) all LCSD lifeguards, irrespective of whether they were under permanent establishment or on contract terms, should possess valid Beach Lifeguard Awards or Pool Lifeguard Awards issued by the Hong Kong Life Saving Society. They were also required to attend induction training course on appointment and conduct regular mobilisation practice on rescue operations at aquatic venues. Moreover, lifeguards were deployed to work in designated aquatic venues throughout the swimming season so that they would be able to familiarize themselves with the environment of the aquatic venue in a short period of time;
- (b) the pay scale of lifeguards appointed on civil service terms would be handled in accordance with the Pay Adjustment Mechanism for the Civil Service. As for those appointed on non-civil-service contract terms, LCSD would conduct reviews regularly taking into account relevant factors such as the salary movements in the lifeguard market, the financial position and manpower requirement of the Department, etc. to decide whether the pay scale should be adjusted and the range of adjustment;
- (c) despite the fact that individual swimming pool management organizations overseas might have set staffing standards for lifeguards, there was no unified international staffing standard for lifeguards due to variations among swimming pool facilities and the modes of use around the world. LCSD's staffing standard was established in 2004 after a working group (composed of members including the representatives from the Hong Kong Life Saving Society and LCSD staff) had conducted site inspections of the venue facilities and consulted staff concerned. LCSD would also conduct annual reviews of staffing arrangements for swimming pools to meet operational needs; and

- (d) additional lifeguards would be hired if the number of users of swimming pool was expected to be higher than normal. Where necessary, arrangements would also be made for inviting honorary lifeguards from the Hong Kong Life Saving Society to be on duty at swimming pools.

Arrangements of public swimming pools in winter

12. At the Council meeting on 17 January 2007, a Member raised a question concerning the arrangements of public swimming pools in winter. The Member expressed concern that only the main pools with warm water, which were deeper than the secondary and training pools, would remain open during the winter months from November to March of the following year. He suggested that the Government should consider improving the facilities at public swimming pools, such as providing warm water in secondary and training pools and installing temporary floor slabs in the main pools during the winter months to reduce the water depth, so as to allow more non-proficient swimmers to go swimming in winter.

13. The Administration advised that apart from the heated main pools where the water was deeper, some training and leisure pools where the water was shallower also had heated pool facilities so as to satisfy the needs of different swimmers. LCSD was studying the feasibility of implementing a trial scheme for the installation of temporary floor slabs to reduce water depth at some swimming lanes at the Yuen Long Swimming Pool and Tuen Mun Swimming Pool so as to make it convenient for swimmers with special needs to use the pools. Furthermore, LCSD was actively increasing the number of swimming pools with heated pool facilities for use by the public.

Latest development

14. Issues relating to staff deployment and management of public swimming pools will be discussed at the meeting of the Panel on Home Affairs scheduled for 10 July 2009.

Relevant papers

15. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat

7 July 2009

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**Relevant documents on
staff deployment and management of public swimming pools**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No./ hyperlink
---	---	Chapter 7 on "Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 42, March 2004	http://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e42ch07.pdf
---	---	Chapter 9 on "Outsourcing of services in the Leisure and Cultural Services Department" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 49, October 2007	http://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e49ch09.pdf
---	---	Chapter 10 on "Provision of recreation and sports services" of the Director of Audit's Report No. 51, October 2008	http://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e51ch10.pdf
Public Accounts Committee	---	Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Reports of the Director of Audit on the Accounts of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the year ended 31 March 2005 and the Results of Value for Money Audits (Report No. 45) (PAC Report No. 45 of February 2006)	PAC Report No. 45 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/pac/reports/45/45_rpt.pdf
	---	The Government Minute of 10 May 2006 in response to Report No. 45 of the Public Accounts Committee dated February 2006	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/pac/minutes/pac_gm_45-e.pdf
Council meeting	15.6.2005	Hon Frederick FUNG's written question on "Lifeguards employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department" and the Administration's reply	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr04-05/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0615ti-confirm-c.pdf (pages 74-75)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No./ hyperlink
	17.1.2007	Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung's written question on "Improving public swimming pool facilities" and the Administration's reply	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0117-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 49-50)
	7.5.2008	Hon Frederick FUNG's written question on "Provision of lifeguard services at public swimming pools and beaches"	http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0507-confirm-ec.pdf (pages 72-75)

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