

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)884/09-10(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 February 2010

Outsourcing of food testing services

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (the Panel) on the outsourcing of food testing services.

Background

2. In 2007, the Government Laboratory (GL) commissioned the Efficiency Unit to conduct a study to explore the feasibility of outsourcing part of its food testing services so that resources thus released could be deployed to conduct method development for new tests, to provide new testing services in support of food legislation to enhance food safety, to conduct testing work involving litigation, and to assist in contract management.
3. GL has started, as a pilot programme, to outsource some 22 000 food tests (including sulphur dioxide, preservatives and organo-chlorine pesticide residues) to accredited private laboratories in 2008-2009.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. At the meeting on 14 April 2009, the Panel was briefed by the Administration on the 2009-2010 Budget initiative to develop Hong Kong into a food testing hub in the region. Members were advised, amongst other, that GL planned to further outsource its regular food surveillance testing work to at least 77 000 (about 50% of its regular food testing work) to accredited private laboratories in 2009-2010. The Hong Kong Accreditation Service (HKAS) under the Innovation and Technology Commission was responsible for providing accreditation service to private laboratories.

5. Concern was raised as to how the Administration could ensure that the food testing performed by accredited private laboratories met international standards of practice.

6. The Administration advised that before granting accreditation, HKAS would send a team of independent specialist experts to assess the competence of the applicant organisation in performing the activities to be accredited. To obtain accreditation, a food testing laboratory must meet the requirements of the International Standard ISO/IEC 17025 and be subject to rigorous on-site assessments and monitoring by the assessors. Performance of accredited organisations was monitored through periodic on-site re-assessments, surprise on-site surveillance visits, proficiency testing programmes, monitoring of changes, and feedback from users of the accredited services. Mandatory re-assessments were conducted one year after the granting of accreditation and at two-year intervals thereafter. Accredited laboratories were visited at least once a year and were required to participate in proficiency testing activity at least once every four years for each major sub-area of major disciplines. In addition, during the contract period, GL would implement a number of quality assurance measures including on-site audits and quality control means such as introduction of blind samples/split samples and control checks to monitor the performance of the contract laboratories including the quality of the test results.

7. Hon Fred LI urged GL not to outsource the some 77 000 food tests to just one or two accredited private laboratories, to avoid monopolisation.

8. The Administration advised that although there were at present 13 accredited private laboratories, only five of them were accredited in the tests to be outsourced by GL. Awarding of outsourcing contracts would be on project basis and based on tender price. The Administration further advised that other private laboratories might enter the food testing market and obtain relevant accreditation from HKAS if there was sufficient market demand for their services. It was estimated that some 20 local laboratories would be accredited for a more comprehensive range of food tests in the coming few years. GL would assist those organisations interested in taking up the outsourcing contracts to obtain accreditation for the specified tests.

Relevant papers

9. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) for details of the relevant paper and minutes of the meeting.