

**Legislative Council
Panel on Development**

**Request for discussion on issues related to backlog of
applications from eateries for carrying out waterworks**

Hon. Tommy CHEUNG submitted a letter on the above subject to the Chairman of the Development Panel on 15 February 2016. At the request of the Chairman of the Development Panel, we set out our response to the concerns expressed in the letter as follows:

- The Government has always attached great importance to the incident of excess lead in drinking water in public rental housing estates (“PRHs”). To protect the safety of drinking water for the general public, the Water Supplies Department (“WSD”) has rolled out various related measures to step up control of plumbing works for inside services. For instance, it has made reference to the approval mechanism of the United Kingdom’s Water Regulations Advisory Scheme for pipes and fittings and set a five-year validity period for the approved pipes and fittings in order to step up control on the installation or use of these items. Four new parameters for heavy metals (including lead) have also been added to the tests of water samples on notification of completion of works. Moreover, licensed plumbers are required to submit to the Water Authority (“WA”) supporting documents of lead free grade soldering materials, if soldering is used in connecting copper pipes in plumbing works. When inspecting new plumbing works, the WA requires non-destructive tests to be conducted on solder joints to check for the presence of lead.
- The WSD has maintained communication with the relevant stakeholders. Before introducing new measures, the WSD would consult the plumbing trade and implement discretionary initiatives or transitional arrangements as required on a case-by-case basis. For instance, the WSD has increased the number of accredited laboratories from 4 to 15 to meet the trade demand for tests for the pipes and fittings that require re-tests upon the expiry of their validity period for general acceptance. To support the implementation of new measures and mitigate their impact on the approval process of plumbing works, the WSD has also redeployed and added staff for processing work and refined the processing procedures. Furthermore, the WSD has put in place transitional arrangements in the light of the actual circumstances. For instance, the supply systems of non-drinking water are allowed to continue to use those pipes and fittings for which the 5-year validity period for general acceptance has expired.

- To facilitate the smooth implementation of new measures, a task group was established in November 2015 with a view to better understand the concerns of the stakeholders and introduce timely and appropriate measures. The group is chaired by the Deputy Director of Water Supplies and comprises members broadly representative of the relevant trades. The WSD also attended meetings of the catering industry to brief them on the new measures and clarify on their doubts.
- We understand that the measures introduced in the wake of the lead in water incident would prolong the time needed to process waterworks applications. In this connection, the WSD has expanded the manpower complement by 30% amounting to 21 staff through redeployment of existing staff and hiring more temporary contract staff in order to expedite the approval process. Furthermore, 15 civil service posts for processing waterworks applications will be created in the WSD (i.e. representing a 20% increase as compared with the original staff complement) in the next financial year. The WSD will closely liaise with the trade and monitor the situation of the processing work. Further expansion of the staff complement and other measures may be considered as and when necessary.
- Subject to the overarching principle of safeguarding the safety of drinking water, the WSD has adopted the above-mentioned transitional arrangements in response to the demand from the trade. These measures also helped to alleviate the pressure on them. Records indicate that the WA has granted general acceptance for over 10 000 items of pipes and fittings. As advised by the trade, the market has an adequate supply and choice for the pipes and fittings that are reportable to the WA for use in waterworks. Moreover, the time taken by the WSD in processing applications for works commencement is on a decreasing trend. For certain categories in particular, such as the catering industry, the processing work has returned to the position before the onset of the lead in water incident.
- Besides, the Development Bureau also provided written reply to the LegCo question on related subject asked by Hon. Tommy CHEUNG on 2 March 2016.

Development Bureau
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