

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1400/20-21
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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights

Minutes of the meeting
held on Tuesday, 22 June 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon CHAN Hak-kan, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH

Member attending : Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH

Member absent : Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai

Public Officers : Items I and II
Miss Erica NG Lai-man
Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1
Mr Amor WONG Yiu-tuen
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health
(Food) 3

Dr Thomas SIT Hon-chung
Assistant Director (Inspection and Quarantine)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Shirley Veronica CHUK Sheung-ying
Senior Veterinary Officer (Animal Management)
Operations
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Dr Mary CHOW Ka-wai
Senior Veterinary Officer (Technical Services)
Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Connie AU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 5

Staff in attendance : Mr Ronald LAU
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Meisy KWOK
Legislative Assistant (2) 5

Action

I. Overview of veterinary services in Hong Kong
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1186/20-21(01) and (02))

The Subcommittee deliberated (index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1 briefed members on the veterinary profession and the veterinary services in Hong Kong, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1186/20-21(01)).

Follow-up actions arising from the discussion

Admin

3. The Administration was requested to provide the percentage of local practising registered veterinary surgeons who had participated in the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong's voluntary continuing professional development ("CPD") scheme and had complied with the relevant CPD requirement.

(Post meeting note: The Administration's response was circulated to members vide LC Paper no. CB(2)1266/20-21 on 6 July 2021.)

Action
Admin

4. The Administration was also requested to relay the views of Mr Steven HO to the Development Bureau that when the Administration resumed agricultural farms and livestock farms for implementing development plans, reasonable compensation should be provided to the farms concerned having regard to their need to comply with the provisions of the relevant legislations when the farms were being resited to another location.

II. Arrangements for pet animals whose owners are subject to quarantine due to coronavirus disease 2019

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1186/20-21(03) and (04))

5. The Subcommittee deliberated (index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

6. With the aid of a powerpoint presentation, Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 1 and Senior Veterinary Officer (Animal Management) Operations of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department briefed members on the arrangements and relevant measures for pet animals whose owners were subject to quarantine due to the coronavirus disease 2019, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1186/20-21(03)).

(Post meeting note: The softcopy of the powerpoint presentation materials provided by the Administration was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1216/20-21(01) on 22 June 2021.)

III. Way forward of the Subcommittee

7. The Chairman said that the Subcommittee had finished its work. Members agreed that this would be the last meeting of the Subcommittee, and the Subcommittee should then conclude its work and prepare a report on its deliberations for submission to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene. Members noted that the draft report, once ready, would be circulated to members for consideration.

IV. Any other business

8. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:41 pm.

**Proceedings of the meeting of the
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights
on Tuesday, 22 June 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
<i>Agenda item I – Overview of veterinary services in Hong Kong</i>			
000546-000947	Chairman Admin	Briefing by the Administration on the veterinary profession and the veterinary services in Hong Kong (LC Paper No. CB(2)1186/20-21(01))	
000948-001518	Chairman Mr SHIU Ka-fai Admin	<p>Mr SHIU Ka-fai's enquiry and the Administration's reply regarding the overseas qualifications recognized by the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong ("VSB") for registration as a veterinary surgeon in Hong Kong.</p> <p>Mr SHIU further enquired whether the Administration would consider providing public veterinary services as pet keeping was increasingly popular in Hong Kong. The Administration advised that there were currently sufficient veterinary surgeons and clinics to provide various services in Hong Kong. In addition, with the launching of a Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine ("BVM") programme by the City University of Hong Kong ("CityU") in 2017, more locally trained veterinary surgeons should be joining the profession in the coming years. That apart, a number of pet insurance products had been introduced in recent years providing pet owners with more options in meeting the medical needs of their pets. The Administration had no plan to provide public veterinary services. It added that the provision of veterinary services by the private sector was the mainstream international practice.</p> <p>Mr SHIU was of the view that if the supply of veterinary surgeons was relatively abundant in Hong Kong, the Administration should consider assisting the locally trained veterinary surgeons to seek development opportunities in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area which could be a potential market for veterinary services. The Administration responded that the annual intake of the BVM programme was about 20 students which was not a significant number in terms of the overall supply of veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong.</p>	
001519-002852	Chairman Admin	Expressing concern about the large number of stray animals in the community, the Chairman considered that the provision of public veterinary services could alleviate	

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		<p>the financial burden of many animal welfare organizations ("AWOs") in meeting the medical expenses of the stray animals that they had rescued or rehomed. He added that the relevant medical expenses had accounted for as much as half of the overall expenditure of these organizations. The Chairman also hoped that the CityU Veterinary Medical Centre would fulfill its corporate social responsibility by providing certain support for the work of AWOs.</p> <p>The Administration advised that it had endeavoured to minimize the number of stray animals arising from animal abandonment by enhancing public education and promoting the concept of responsible pet ownership. In addition, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department ("AFCD") had been providing financial assistance to AWOs under a subvention scheme to conduct projects relating to the promotion of animal welfare and animal management (e.g. providing medical treatment for stray animals and implementing publicity programmes to promote animal adoption). Apart from that, AFCD had also provided subvention to its rehoming partners to provide free desexing operations to the animals adopted through them.</p> <p>The Chairman was of the view that the Administration should provide veterinary services to its retired working dogs. He pointed out that many of these working dogs had developed various health problems after having worked for the government for years but their post-retirement medical expenses had to be borne by their adopters which were often their handlers. The Administration advised that AFCD and the relevant government departments would now provide veterinary services to the retired working dogs. For individual cases involving complex surgical operations, the arrangements would have to be considered by the departments concerned on a case-by-case basis. The Chairman welcomed the provision of veterinary services to the retired working dogs by the Administration but he hoped that the services could be extended to cover surgical treatments as well.</p> <p>On the Chairman's enquiry regarding the number of complaints that VSB had handled after its reconstitution in 2020, the Administration advised that the newly constituted VSB had come into full operation in October 2020, and in just seven months the Preliminary Investigation Committee ("PIC") had finished the investigation of a total of 52 complaint cases while the Inquiry Committee ("IC") had held six disciplinary</p>	

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		<p>inquiry hearings and concluded eight cases. The Administration believed that with the increase in the number of members of VSB and the addition of a panel of 18 assessors after reconstitution and from which PIC and IC might be appointed, VSB could further speed up the handling of complaints in the coming months.</p>	
002853-004336	<p>Chairman Mr Steven HO Admin</p>	<p>Mr Steven HO questioned why the level of charges for local veterinary services had remained high despite the increasing number of veterinary surgeons available in Hong Kong as compared to a number of other places. He considered it worthwhile for the Administration to conduct a study on the level of charges for veterinary services in different places and find out the factors attributable to their differences. The Administration responded that the level of charges for veterinary services would depend on a number of factors such as rent and staff cost and as such it was not appropriate to make a direct comparison of the charges in different places. That said, the Administration advised that according to their understanding the charges for clinic consultations and common treatment procedures for pets in Hong Kong were broadly comparable to those of other countries.</p> <p>Mr HO suggested that consideration should be given to provide venues at reduced rental for operating veterinary clinics so that veterinary services could be made more affordable to the general public. The Administration advised that it had no plan to subsidize the provision of veterinary services in Hong Kong using public coffers. The Administration believed that as more locally trained veterinary surgeons became available in Hong Kong in the coming years, it would help to enhance the overall price competitiveness of veterinary services.</p> <p>The Chairman and Mr HO considered that the Administration should collect data in the population census regarding the keeping of pets by local households as those information would be useful to the Administration in planning related policies. The Administration responded that AFCD had requested the Census and Statistics Department ("C & SD") to collect data on the keeping of cats and dogs by households in the Thematic Household Survey conducted in 2018. AFCD would actively liaise with C & SD regarding the collection of similar data in the census exercise but such a request had to be considered by C & SD having regard to a number of other requests from various government departments.</p>	

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		<p>The Chairman's enquiry and the Administration's reply regarding the specialties in veterinary medicine.</p> <p>Mr HO hoped that more veterinary surgeons would be available to provide services for local livestock farms. He was of the view that when the Administration resumed agricultural farms and livestock farms for implementing development plans, reasonable compensation should be provided to the farms concerned having regard to their need to comply with the provisions of the relevant legislations when the farms were being resited to another location. At the request of Mr HO, the Administration undertook to relay his views to the Development Bureau.</p>	<p>Admin (paragraph 4 of the minutes refers)</p>
004337-010037	Chairman Ms Elizabeth QUAT Admin	<p>Ms Elizabeth QUAT also questioned why veterinary services were so costly in Hong Kong despite the relatively abundant supply of veterinary surgeons. She echoed the view of Mr Steven HO in respect of the need to collect data regarding the level of charges for veterinary services in Hong Kong and overseas as well as the number of cats and dogs kept by local households. Ms QUAT was concerned that pet owners might abandon their pets if they were unable to afford the pets' medical expenses. She considered that pet keeping should be made accessible to all.</p> <p>The Administration advised that:</p> <p>(a) practising veterinary surgeons were required to comply with the Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons ("CoP") promulgated by VSB and transgressing accepted codes of professional ethical behaviour might lead to disciplinary action by VSB. The CoP had stipulated that veterinary surgeons should not charge exorbitant fees. Members of the public could lodge complaints with VSB if they had grievances over the fees charged by the veterinary surgeons;</p> <p>(b) according to the result of a study commissioned by AFCD earlier on regarding the provision of veterinary services in Hong Kong, the charges for a general consultation on cats/dogs ranged from \$100 to \$400 while that for a routine vaccination ranged from \$200 to \$400;</p> <p>(c) various pet insurance products were available on the market at affordable premiums to provide more options to pet owners in meeting the medical expenses of their pets in the event of unexpected illness; and</p>	

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		<p>(d) AFCD had all along been educating the public to think carefully before getting a pet, including whether they could afford the various costs.</p> <p>The Chairman remained the view that the level of charges for veterinary services was beyond the reach of many low-income families and that the issue could not be addressed simply by taking out medical insurance on the pets. The Chairman urged the Administration to consider the suggestion from members on the provision of public veterinary services.</p> <p>Noting that participation in VSB's continuing professional development ("CPD") scheme for veterinary surgeons was voluntary, Ms QUAT questioned how VSB could ensure that the registered veterinary surgeons would maintain currency in skills and knowledge as required in CoP. The Administration responded that in general practising veterinary surgeons would continually upgrade their professional competency as evident from the increase in the number of specialist veterinary surgeons every year. At the request of Ms QUAT, the Administration undertook to provide supplementary information on the percentage of local practising registered veterinary surgeons who had participated in the CPD scheme and have complied with the relevant voluntary CPD requirement.</p> <p>Ms QUAT's enquiry and the Administration's response regarding the development of Chinese veterinary medicine in Hong Kong.</p>	<p>Admin (paragraph 3 of the minutes refers)</p>
<p><i>Agenda item II – Arrangements for pet animals whose owners are subject to quarantine due to coronavirus disease 2019</i></p>			
010038-010812	Chairman Admin	Briefing and powerpoint presentation by the Administration on the arrangements and relevant measures for pet animals whose owners are subject to quarantine due to the coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") (LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1186/20-21(03) and CB(2)1216/20-21(01))	
010813-011259	Chairman Admin	The Chairman sought clarification from the Administration regarding the possibility for COVID-19 to transmit from animals to humans as the public was concerned about the potential risk of spreading the disease by pet animals. He recalled that Professor YUEN Kwok-yung, member of the Government's Expert Advisory Group, had mentioned that mutated COVID-19 virus was found to have been circulating between minks and humans in Denmark. The Administration advised that different animal species had different susceptibility	

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		<p>to COVID-19 and the case in Demark involved farmed minks. There was currently no evidence that pet animals, such as cats, dogs and hamsters, were transmitting COVID-19 to humans. The Administration stressed that the World Organisation for Animal Health had also indicated that there was no evidence of pets playing an epidemiological role in the spread of COVID-19.</p> <p>The Chairman asked how long the pets concerned would stay in AFCD's designated animal keeping facility for quarantine and veterinary surveillance. The Administration advised that quarantine of pet animals would generally last about seven days during which AFCD would collect samples from the animals concerned at least twice. Animals tested positive for COVID-19 virus would only be returned to their owners upon consecutive negative results.</p> <p>The Chairman's further enquiry and the Administration's reply on the latest situation of the 17 animals (as at the end of May 2021) which had been tested positive for COVID-19 virus during quarantine at AFCD's designated animal keeping facility.</p>	
011300-011410	Chairman Ms Elizabeth QUAT Admin	<p>Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired what were the potential sequelae of COVID-19 in pet animals. The Administration advised that so far none of the 17 pet animals which had been tested positive for COVID-19 virus during quarantine had displayed relevant symptoms.</p> <p>The Chairman and Ms QUAT acknowledged AFCD's effort in handling the pet animals whose owners were confirmed to be infected with COVID-19 or placed under quarantine due to COVID-19.</p>	
<i>Agenda item III – Way forward of the Subcommittee</i>			
011411-011501	Chairman	Remarks on the completion of the Subcommittee's work and submission of report to the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene.	
<i>Agenda item IV – Any other business</i>			
011502-011521	Chairman	Closing remarks	