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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights

**Information note prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 22 June 2021**

Overview of veterinary services in Hong Kong

According to the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Ordinance (Cap. 529) ("the Ordinance"), no person shall practice veterinary surgery or provide veterinary service in Hong Kong unless the person is registered with the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong¹ ("VSB") or in possession of a valid practising certificate issued by VSB. All registered veterinary surgeons are required to comply with the Ordinance and the Code of Practice for the Guidance of Registered Veterinary Surgeons ("the CoP") promulgated by VSB.

Supply of veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong

2. According to the Administration's replies to Members' initial written questions during the examination of the Estimates of Expenditures 2021-2022, the number of local registered veterinary surgeons in 2018, 2019 and 2020 was 988, 1 049 and 1 075 respectively. The veterinarian-to-pet ratio is a common indicator for assessing the overall situation of veterinary services and the higher the ratio, the greater the number of veterinary surgeons. The veterinarian-to-pet (dogs and cats) ratio in Hong Kong was

¹ The Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong is a statutory authority established under the Ordinance and is responsible for the regulation of the practice of veterinary surgery, the registration of veterinary surgeons, and the disciplinary control of the professional activities of registered veterinary surgeons in Hong Kong.

about 1:410 in 2018² which was far above the ratios of other places including Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States. According to the report of study on the development of the veterinary profession in Hong Kong published by VSB in 2017, there were 146 private veterinary clinics in Hong Kong as at mid-2016.

3. According to the Administration, the number of registered veterinary surgeons continues to rise in recent years, and with locally trained veterinary surgeons expected to be available in a few years' time, pet owners should be able to find suitable veterinary services in Hong Kong for their pets. That apart, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has been subventing animal welfare organizations (such as the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in support of their work on safeguarding animal welfare, including the provision of veterinary services.

Disclosure of price information

4. According to the CoP, veterinary surgeons shall make available to their clients or prospective clients a schedule of their normal fees and charges for consultations, routine tests and routine procedures, which may be done by way of a notice displayed at the veterinary surgeon's clinic containing the schedule or stating that the schedule is available on request. The CoP has also stipulated that anticipated outcomes of the various treatment/surgery options available with cost estimates must always be fully discussed with the client before treatment and it is essential that the client is kept fully briefed about changes to both prognosis and costs by regular communication with the attending veterinary surgeon.

Handling of complaints against veterinary surgeons

5. In accordance with the Rules of the Veterinary Surgeons Board (Disciplinary Proceedings), all complaints about veterinary surgeons received by VSB are first investigated by the Preliminary Investigation Committee, which will determine whether or not the cases should be referred to the Inquiry Committee for disciplinary inquiry. The number of complaints about registered veterinary surgeons received by VSB, the number of complaint cases referred to the Inquiry Committee and the number of cases found

² According to the Thematic Household Survey Report No. 66 compiled by the Census and Statistics Department, there were about 221 100 dogs and 184 100 cats being kept by households in Hong Kong in 2018. Meanwhile, there were 988 registered veterinary surgeons in 2018.

substantiated upon completion of disciplinary inquiry hearings over the past three years are in the **Appendix**. According to the Administration, the complaints received were mainly related to the result or process of diagnosis and treatment or surgery by the veterinary surgeons. Over the past three years, a total of 10 complaint cases in relation to the conviction of disciplinary offences of misconduct or neglect in a professional respect of veterinary surgeons were found substantiated by the Inquiry Committee after conducting inquiry hearings.

Subcommittee meeting on 22 June 2021

6. The Administration will provide more details regarding the veterinary services in Hong Kong at the Subcommittee meeting on 22 June 2021.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 June 2021

**Number of complaints about registered veterinary surgeons received by
the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong
over the past three years**

Year	Number of complaints received	Number of complaints dismissed after preliminary investigation	Number of complaints referred to Inquiry Committee*	Number of inquiry hearings completed within the year	Number of complaints found substantiated upon inquiry hearings
2018	51 [#]	41	1	8	7
2019	41 [#]	32	1	2 [^]	1
2020	42 [#]	18	0	2 [^]	2

Some of the cases are still being investigated.

* As at February 2021

[^] To match with the holding of the first Election of Members to the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong ("VSB") in 2020 in accordance with the Veterinary Surgeons Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2015, disciplinary inquiry hearings were suspended from the second half of 2019 to the first half of 2020. After the newly constituted VSB has come into full operation on 1 October 2020, VSB resumed disciplinary inquiry hearings in November 2020.

Source: Administration's reply to an initial written question raised by Hon CHAN Hak-kan during the examination of the Estimates of Expenditures 2021-2022 (Reply Serial No. FHB(FE)021).