

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1573/20-21
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/FE

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 14 September 2021, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, SBS, JP
Hon CHAN Han-pan, BBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon Kenneth LAU Ip-keung, BBS, MH, JP
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP

Members absent : Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon LAU Kwok-fan, MH, JP

Public Officers : Item III

Dr CHUI Tak-yi, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Mr Parson LAM Chun-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Miss Diane WONG Shuk-han, JP
Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr LEUNG Yat-king
Assistant Director (Operations) 3
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr CHAN Kut-yee
Senior Superintendent (Cleansing and Pest Control) 1
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr Simon CHAN Kwok-chiu
Chief Project Manager 301
Architectural Services Department

Mr Raymond CHAN Bak-hang
Chief Property Services Manager/3
Architectural Services Department

Mr LEE Che-kit
Assistant Director/3 (Acting)
Electrical and Mechanical Services Department

Item IV

Dr CHUI Tak-yi, JP
Under Secretary for Food and Health

Mr Parson LAM Chun-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) 2

Mr Eric TSAI Yu-sing
Assistant Director (Grade Management and Development)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Mr LEUNG Fo-man
Senior Superintendent (Operations) 3 (Acting)
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Josephine SO
Chief Council Secretary (2) 2

Staff in attendance : Ms Wendy LO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 2

Mr Clement HAU
Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Pansy KWONG
Legislative Assistant (2) 2

Action

I. Information papers issued since the last meeting

Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting:

- (a) Administration's information paper regarding the safety and labelling of genetically modified food (LC Paper No. CB(2)1446/20-21(01)); and
- (b) Administration's information paper regarding the Government's implementation of measures to reduce salt and sugar in food (LC Paper No. CB(2)1446/20-21(02)).

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1450/20-21(01) and (02))

Policy briefing-cum-meeting on 12 October 2021

2. Members agreed that the next regular meeting of the Panel would be held on Tuesday, 12 October 2021 from 2:30 pm to 4:00 pm to receive a briefing by the Secretary for Food and Health on the relevant policy initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address.

III. Improvement of management and hygiene conditions of public toilets: Administration's follow-up actions in response to the recommendations made in the respective report of The Ombudsman published in May 2021 and the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Improvement of Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/20-21(03), Direct Investigation Report entitled "Management and Repair of Public Toilets by Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Architectural Services Department" issued by the Office of The Ombudsman, and Report of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Improvement of Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape (LC Paper No. CB(2)1327/20-21))

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Food and Health ("USFH") advised that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD") had taken follow-up actions in response to the recommendations made in The Ombudsman's direct investigation report published in May 2021 as well as those in the report of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Improvement of Environmental Hygiene and Cityscape, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/20-21(03)). With the aid of power-point presentation, Deputy Director (Environmental Hygiene)/FEHD ("DD(EH)/FEHD") highlighted FEHD's efforts in various areas which aimed to improve the environmental hygiene of public toilets.

Maintenance and management of public toilets

Facilities and service levels of public toilets

4. Mr KWOK Wai-keung said that the sanitary conditions and service levels of public toilets had always been issues of public concern as they affected public health and hygiene. He enquired about the number of public toilets in which sensor-activated facilities, e.g. automatic sensor taps, soap dispensers or flushing system, were installed. Noting that toilet attendants were deployed to public toilets with high utilization rates ("high-utilization public toilets") (i.e. with 300 visitors or more a day), Mr KWOK asked whether the Administration had reviewed if the hygiene conditions of those toilets had improved; and whether the Administration would consider deploying toilet attendants to more public toilets.

5. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that FEHD would as far as possible install facilities with sensor-activated functions in new or reprovisioned public toilets or when existing toilets were refurbished or facelifted. Apart from the provision of toilet attendants to high-utilization public toilets, roving cleansing teams would be deployed to conduct cleansing operations to suit the actual needs. FEHD had developed a "smart public toilet system" to collect daily

Action

operation data of public toilets for reference in the review of service quality and management effectiveness, as well as for the introduction of new technologies for better design. FEHD was also working with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department ("EMSD") to consider making use of the Government-Wide Internet-of-Things Network to launch a "smart toilet pilot programme" to collect useful information and data for better efficacy of cleansing, housekeeping and maintenance of public toilets.

6. Mr Vincent CHENG asked whether FEHD would increase the number of toilet attendants deployed to public toilets with very high utilization rates to alleviate the pressure of frontline staff. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that for public toilets with very high utilization, two toilet attendants were provided for the period with the highest utilization to cater for the actual needs. Subject to actual usage, some public toilets were further provided with all-day toilet attendant service, i.e. toilet attendant service on even midnight shift other than day shift and night shift. To further enhance the cleanliness and hygiene of public toilets, FEHD had increased deep cleansing operations by its contractors to reduce the daily work of toilet attendants subject to the actual patronage of individual public toilets.

7. Mr KWOK Wai-keung enquired whether the Administration had conducted analysis on public toilets with low utilization rates, with a view to improving the planning, provision and management of public toilet facilities. DD(EH)/FEHD advised that some public toilets were built in rural areas at the requests and for the interest of nearby residents. FEHD would consult the local communities when reviewing the provision of public toilets with relatively low utilization rates.

8. Mr Wilson OR said that he had received complaints from members of the public about the slow progress of repair works for public toilets. He asked whether FEHD and relevant departments had enhanced coordination and expedited the repair works after the development and adoption of the "minor works order record system" mobile application ("mobile app") since the second quarter of 2019. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that through the said mobile app, FEHD could make repair requests to the Architectural Services Department ("ArchSD") and EMSD and keep track of the progress of repair works, thereby improving the precision of various records and expediting the repair process of public toilets. As at July 2021, ArchSD and EMSD had completed the repair works of 99.9% of the repair requests they received within the ranges of the target completion dates.

9. The Deputy Chairman hoped that FEHD could continue to expedite the repair process of public toilets. In his view, while there had been improvement in the hygiene conditions of some public toilets in recent years, FEHD should assign officers at managerial grade to conduct more frequently site inspections

Action

of public toilets to check whether the cleansing service was up to standard and to ensure timely follow-up actions. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that in addition to inspecting public toilets in accordance with the established mechanism, FEHD's staff (including those at managerial level) would conduct further inspections if deemed appropriate. Complaints on the level of cleanliness received would be followed up and handled promptly.

10. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan considered it necessary to improve the quality of consumables provided for use in public toilets (e.g. soap and toilet paper) and to provide therein more sanitizing facilities during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that performance indicators covering the scope of service and the specifications and quality standards of consumables provided in public toilets were stipulated in the relevant cleansing service contracts for compliance by the outsourced contractors. Apart from the provision of sanitizing facilities such as toilet seat sanitizers inside toilet compartments and hand sanitizers near soap dispensers, FEHD had applied anti-microbial coating to the high-touch facilities in some public toilets of high utilization rates to inhibit the growth of bacteria and viruses in view of the epidemic.

11. The Chairman and Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that FEHD should focus on improving the management of public toilets and allocate more resources and manpower to enhance their hygiene conditions (e.g. installing air-conditioning systems to help ameliorate the odour problem). Publicity and education efforts should also be strengthened to address the problem of vandalism at public toilet facilities. The Chairman opined that in light of the epidemic, FEHD should install suitable facilities (e.g. foot pedal type flushing cistern or automatic lowering-down toilet lid) in public toilets to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

12. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that FEHD had applied technologies in a number of areas to improve hygiene, enhance management and achieve timely maintenance of public toilets. For instance, automatic or sensor-type (including hand-wave sensors) flushing systems had been installed in some public toilets to minimize high-touch areas. Nano Plasma Driven Catalysis air purification technology, Nano Confined Catalytic Oxidation technology, microalgae green wall systems and atomized ozonated water technology had been put on trial to eliminate odour and improve air quality. FEHD would continue to explore the use of technology for enhancing the hygiene conditions of public toilets. Also, FEHD had advised the public through publicity to put the toilet lid down before flushing, and would continue to strengthen public education by reminding the public to be civic-minded when using public toilet facilities.

Action

Follow-up actions in response to The Ombudsman's direct investigation report

13. Mr Wilson OR asked whether the Administration had devised any performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of relevant departments in following up the 11 recommendations made in The Ombudsman's direct investigation report. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung noted from the Annex to the Administration's paper that The Ombudsman had, among others, recommended FEHD to "conduct comprehensive statistical analysis on cases involving issuance of default notices to contractors and deduction of monthly service fees related to public toilet cleansing services with a view to identifying inadequacies and introducing specific improvement measures" (recommendation 2) and "draw up specific performance indicators for directly managed toilets for compliance by the FEHD's frontline staff" (recommendation 4). He expressed concern that FEHD had yet to complete the follow-up actions in respect of these two recommendations.

14. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that regarding recommendation 2, FEHD was making improvements to its Contract Management System for more effective collection of records on follow-up actions (including verbal warnings and default notices issued by District Environmental Hygiene Offices against defaults by contractors) and would conduct statistical analysis and take specific improvement actions/measures as necessary. The revamp work of the system, which inevitably took time, was scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2022. In relation to recommendation 4, FEHD was conducting a review and making reference to the performance indicators of outsourced street cleansing service contracts in order to adapt them as specific performance indicators for application to directly-managed toilets for compliance by FEHD's frontline staff. The existing FEHD's Operation Manual for Cleansing Services, which provided guidelines on maintenance of venues and facilities (including public toilets) as well as management of public toilets for compliance by its staff, would be revised as appropriate. The exercise was scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2022.

15. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung expressed concern that the hygiene conditions of some high-utilization public toilets were unsatisfactory, with dilapidated facilities and damaged items pending repair. Mr LEUNG and the Chairman shared the view of The Ombudsman that FEHD should strengthen the monitoring of the performance of cleansing service contractors in performing cleansing services for public toilets. Mr LEUNG asked whether the Administration would consider engaging members of the public in evaluating the hygiene and service levels of public toilets.

16. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that to seek innovative ideas for developing ideal public toilets, FEHD and ArchSD had co-organized a design thinking programme called "Toilet Tells: Rediscover Public Toilet" ("Toilet Tells").

Action

Through a number of workshops organized under Toilet Tells, views of various stakeholders on the service, design, management and maintenance of public toilets were collected. FEHD would also keep itself abreast with the comments from the public on the management and hygiene conditions of public toilets reflected in opinion polls conducted by media organizations.

Refurbishment or facelifting works of public toilets

17. Mr Vincent CHENG and Mr Tony TSE were pleased to note that the facilities and hygiene levels of some public toilets had been significantly improved after the refurbishment or facelifting works carried out under the Enhanced Public Toilet Refurbishment Programme ("EPTRP"). While expressing appreciation for the efforts made by FEHD on this front, Mr CHENG and Mr Wilson OR asked whether improvement works under EPTRP could be expedited.

18. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that from 2000-2001 to 2020-2021, refurbishment works for 475 public toilets and facelifting works for another 51 public toilets had been included in the relevant programmes. So far, refurbishment works for 388 public toilets and facelifting works for another 41 public toilets had been completed. Also, in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, refurbishment or facelifting works for about 100 public toilets had been included in the relevant programmes. This was against the background of the announcement in the 2019-2020 Budget that the Government would make an allocation of over \$600 million to implement EPTRP for about 240 public toilets by phases in five years from 2019-2020 onwards. To expedite the progress of improvement works for public toilets (in particular those situated in the rural areas), FEHD and ArchSD were actively exploring the application of Modular Integrated Construction ("MiC") and Design for Manufacture and Assembly ("DfMA") in public toilet refurbishment and improvement works to shorten on-site construction time and the closure period of public toilets. For instance, the on-site construction time for refurbishment works, depending on vehicular accessibility and spatial condition of the existing toilet, could be shortened to about two months with the application of the DfMA method.

19. Ms Elizabeth QUAT considered that FEHD should refurbish or renovate more public toilets to improve their service quality. The Administration was requested to revert in writing on whether it had any plans to expand EPTRP to include all public toilets under the management of FEHD and if yes, the timetable for carrying out refurbishment or facelifting works in respective public toilets. Regarding the complaints about the refurbishment works for Shan Mei Street Public Toilet in Fo Tan as referred to by Ms QUAT, DD(EH)/FEHD said that FEHD would follow up the case after the meeting.

Admin

Action

(*Post-meeting note:* The Administration had followed up on the case and its written response on the matter was circulated via LC Paper No. CB(2)1514/20-21 on 4 October 2021.)

20. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan urged FEHD to improve the facilities and hygiene conditions of public toilets situated in the rural areas, many of which, in her view, were far from satisfactory. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that FEHD would shortlist public toilets, including those in the rural areas, for improvement works by phases after all refurbishment or facelifting projects for the 240 public toilets had been included in EPTRP as announced in the 2019-2020 Budget. Piloting the application of MiC and DfMA in the improvement projects for several public toilets in the rural areas and new public toilets was scheduled to commence in 2022-2023. If the evaluation results were satisfactory, the Administration would consider phasing in these construction methods in the improvement works of more public toilets in the rural areas and the construction of new public toilets from 2023-2024.

21. Mr Tony TSE suggested that in carrying out refurbishing or facelifting projects, the Administration should consider increasing the number of toilet compartments/urinals and other facilities for high-utilization public toilets. Also, FEHD should take into consideration the number of public toilets available in close proximity (including those provided by the private sector) in planning for the provision of public toilets. DD(EH)/FEHD responded that FEHD would monitor the usage of public toilets in planning the provision, reprovisioning, refurbishment and facelifting of public toilet facilities. When carrying out these works, FEHD would improve the facilities of public toilets as far as practicable having regard to the actual circumstances of individual public toilets. Also, new technologies (e.g. smart toilets and mobile app informing the public of availability of public toilets and private toilets) could facilitate the Administration in exploring the provision of public toilets from a more holistic perspective.

Pilot scheme on "smart public toilet system" and "smart toilet pilot programme"

22. Ms Elizabeth QUAT expressed support for the adoption of technologies to improve public toilet service and management effectiveness. She sought details about the pilot scheme on "smart public toilet system" and the "smart toilet pilot programme" and asked whether the Administration had any plans to expand the coverage of the above pilot scheme/programme. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan raised a similar enquiry.

23. Mr Wilson OR considered the Administration's progress in exploring technologies to enhance service quality and management effectiveness in relation to public toilets too slow. He asked whether the Administration had

Action

any concrete plans to make use of the data collected by the pilot scheme/programme.

24. DD(EH)/FEHD advised that FEHD had piloted the "smart public toilet system" in the Tsim Sha Tsui East Public Transport Interchange Public Toilet and the Southorn Centre Public Toilet in Wan Chai since May 2021. The data collected by the smart public toilet system included: (a) the usage of public toilets, such as visitor flow and the occupancy status of toilet compartments/urinals; (b) environmental parameters, such as temperature, humidity and odour; (c) the usage of consumables, such as soap, toilet paper, toilet seat sanitizers and hand sanitizers; and (d) operating status of electrical and mechanical equipment, such as hand dryers and sensor-type devices. The daily operation data collected would be useful in the review of service quality and management effectiveness, as well as for the introduction of new technologies for better design. The pilot scheme on "smart public toilet system" would end in April 2022.

25. Assistant Director/3 (Acting)/EMSD added that FEHD and EMSD had started launching the "smart toilet pilot programme" in July 2021. It was expected that the relevant smart devices would be successfully installed at 10 FEHD public toilets over the territory from the third quarter of 2021 onwards to collect useful information and data for better efficacy of cleansing, housekeeping and maintenance. The system would also provide members of the public with useful information on the occupancy status of the toilets. DD(EH)/FEHD said that FEHD would review the effectiveness of the pilot scheme/programme before deciding on the way forward.

Admin

26. Ms Elizabeth QUAT requested the Administration to provide the following supplementary information:

- (a) details and the implementation progress of (i) the pilot scheme on "smart public toilet system" and (ii) the "smart toilet pilot programme"; and
- (b) whether the Administration had any plans to expand the coverage of the above pilot scheme/programme and to install the relevant devices in more public toilets after completion of the pilot scheme/programme and if yes, details of the Administration's plans.

IV. Promotion of green burial

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1450/20-21(04) and (05))

27. At the invitation of the Chairman, USFH briefed members on the Administration's work progress in promoting green burial, as set out in the

Action

Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/20-21(04)). With the aid of power-point presentation, Assistant Director (Grade Management and Development)/FEHD ("AD(GMD)/FEHD") highlighted the improved green burial services and facilities as well as FEHD's enhanced promotional efforts relating to green burial.

Promotion of green burial

28. The Deputy Chairman, Ms Elizabeth QUAT and Mr Tony TSE expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the Administration in promoting green burial as a more environmentally friendly and sustainable means of handling ashes of the deceased. Pointing out that there was only a slight increase in the percentage share of green burial cases in the total number of deaths in recent years, they considered it necessary for the Administration to strengthen its efforts in promoting green burial.

29. Mr Tony TSE sought details of the "design thinking" approach in improving green burial services. In response, AD(GMD)/FEHD advised that "design thinking" was a user-based problem-solving approach. Centred on the needs of service users, it sought innovative and appropriate solutions to various issues and created more possibilities and room for sustainable development. FEHD planned to conduct a tender exercise by end of 2021 to shortlist a contractor to organize "design thinking" workshops with a view to collecting views and innovative ideas from the public and stakeholders, thereby further improving green burial services and encouraging more people to adopt green burial.

30. Noting that FEHD had conducted two questionnaire surveys in 2020 to gauge the views of stakeholders and members of the public on green burial, the Deputy Chairman and Ms Elizabeth QUAT enquired whether the surveys had revealed any reasons for adopting or not adopting green burial. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that according to the findings of the surveys, the main reason for the respondents to choose green burial was to respect the wishes of the deceased. Another important reason was that green burial featured rituals in a simpler form and was more environmentally friendly. Some respondents, however, chose to place the ashes of the deceased in niches because they wished to follow the tradition of paying tribute to the deceased at a designated place.

31. Ms Elizabeth QUAT said that some members of the public had relayed to her that they preferred to dispose of the ashes of the deceased at a specific location so that the descendants knew where to visit when they wanted to pay tribute to their ancestors. The scattering of ashes at sea or at certain unspecified locations in Gardens of Remembrance ("GoRs") made it difficult for them to perform memorial rituals for their lost loved ones. Ms QUAT opined that the

Action

scattering of ashes at designated locations within GoRs where trees were planted might facilitate the performing of memorial rituals. She suggested that more trees be planted in GoRs for such purpose.

32. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that the Administration would consider Ms Elizabeth QUAT's suggestion. Indeed, the Administration recognized the need for sustained efforts to fortify the necessary mindset changes so as to turn green burial into the mainstream mode for handling human ashes. FEHD would keep improving green burial services and facilities, and step up public education to enhance public acceptance of green burial. For instance, GoRs with designs blending in with the surrounding natural environment had been built in recent years to offer peaceful ambience for visitors in remembrance of their family members and friends. Dedicated walls were erected at each GoR for mounting commemorative plaques, if so preferred, in memory of the deceased.

33. The Deputy Chairman suggested that a dedicated website be provided to members of the public to create memorial webpages for their lost loved ones. The website should offer a wide range of design layouts and templates with different themes (e.g. images showing Chinese or western style of memorial rituals) for users to create personalized webpages for memorial purposes. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that in June 2010, FEHD launched the Internet Memorial Service ("IMS") which provided a free memorial website (www.memorial.gov.hk) for users to create memorial webpages for their lost loved ones and to pay tribute to them at any time and from anywhere. A mobile app of IMS was also launched in June 2018, making it easier for the public to pay tribute to their deceased family members and friends. The functions of the mobile app included personalized profile settings, message notifications and social media sharing. The Administration would consider the Deputy Chairman's suggestions on enhancing IMS.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman directed that the meeting be extended for 15 minutes beyond the appointed ending time.]

Provision of GoRs and scattering ashes at sea

34. The Chairman considered that the GoR in the Tsang Tsui Columbarium was too far away from the urban areas. He suggested that the Administration should consider identifying a site closer to the urban areas in New Territories West for building another GoR. Also, it would be desirable to reserve land in new districts for the development of green burial facilities.

35. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that at present, members of the public might scatter ashes of the deceased in 13 GoRs set up in nine FEHD's columbaria located in various districts across the territory. The Administration

Action

had requested the Development Bureau to identify suitable sites for provision of green burial facilities, when planning for the development of new districts.

36. Noting that for the purpose of scattering ashes at sea, each ferry trip could accommodate 25 applicants and each applicant could be accompanied by, at most, 10 family members, relatives or friends on board, Mr Tony TSE asked whether the quota on the number of participants allowed for each party/group to use the free ferry services could be lifted. He also asked whether a precise location would be provided for disposition of ashes so that members of the public could visit and pay tribute to the deceased in the future at the exact waters where ashes had been scattered.

37. AD(GMD)/FEHD responded that members of the public might apply for scattering ashes at sea at three designated locations, i.e. east of Tap Mun, east of Tung Lung Chau and south of West Lamma Channel. The coordinates indicating the exact locations were available on FEHD's website. At present, free ferry service was provided every Saturday. FEHD also arranged free memorial sailings at the grave-sweeping seasons to assist the public in paying tribute to the deceased at the waters where ashes were scattered. Since 2020, the number of memorial sailings had increased from four to eight each year (including four during the Ching Ming Festival and four during the Chung Yeung Festival). So far, there had been few requests from applicants for bringing relatives or friends to a ferry trip more than the limit of 10. Subject to the actual needs, FEHD might adjust the frequency of free ferry trips.

38. The Chairman said that FEHD staff should remind members of the public not to throw the urns into the sea after scattering the ashes of the deceased. In response, AD(GMD)/FEHD advised that a funeral director would be on board to assist bereaved families in the memorial ceremonies and bio-degradable bags (which would decompose in the water) were provided for holding ashes to be scattered into the water to minimize the impact on marine environment. So far, no case of illegal disposal of urns had been reported.

V. Any other business

39. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:24 pm.