

Chapter 5

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

Audit conducted a review to examine the provision and management of aquatic recreational and sports facilities by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and to ascertain whether there were areas for improvement.

Gazetted beaches

2. According to paragraph 2.4(a) of the Audit Report, a consultant, who carried out a coastal safety audit on the beaches of Hong Kong in 2000, had advised that the Rocky Bay Beach should be deleted from the list of gazetted beaches because of safety reason and low usage. However, the LCSD considered that de-gazetting beaches was a sensitive issue and decided not to take further action. The Committee asked about the sensitivity of the de-gazetting and whether the LCSD would de-gazette the beach.

3. In response, **Ms Anissa WONG Sean-ye, Director of Leisure and Cultural Services**, said that:

- in deciding to close the Rocky Bay Beach because of its poor water quality, the Administration had considered whether the beach should be de-gazetted. At that time, the Administration was of the view that it should consider the development of the beach water quality. It was also concerned that the relevant District Council and beach goers might consider that they might need to observe the development of the issue for a period of time; and
- taking into account the current situation of the water quality, the usage of the beach, as well as other factors, such as the usage rate of the Shek O Beach, the LCSD agreed in principle to Audit's recommendation that the Rocky Bay Beach be de-gazetted. The LCSD would seek the views of the relevant District Council on the proposed de-gazetting of the beach.

4. Noting that some of the gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District were closed because the water quality of these beaches had deteriorated following the full commissioning of the Stage 1 of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme (HATS), the Committee asked whether the LCSD had forewarned or warned the public about the matter.

5. **Mr Paul CHEUNG Kwok-kee, Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1**, said that the LCSD was not aware in advance of the adverse impact of the Stage 1 of the HATS. As the water in these beaches was shallow, rainfall might bring pollutants from the land to the beaches. As a result, the beach water quality

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

was affected. As the beach water quality was affected by many environmental factors, the LCSD, in consultation with the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), monitored the water quality regularly and, through posting prominent notices on the beaches, advised beach goers whether the current beach water quality was good, fair or poor.

6. The Committee noted that the seven gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District had been closed. Although Table 4 in paragraph 2.4(b) of the Audit Report showed that the daily average number of beach goers at these beaches in 2002 was low, beach goers still went to these beaches. The Committee asked:

- about the actions taken by the LCSD to make these beaches suitable for public use; and
- how the health of the beach goers could be safeguarded, and what actions the LCSD had taken to ensure that the public did not swim at these beaches.

7. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** responded that:

- the LCSD, the EPD and the Drainage Services Department would join together to improve the water quality of these beaches. The LCSD did not de-gazette these beaches as it saw the public need for them. It hoped that the beaches would be reopened as soon as possible; and
- as a result of the closure of these beaches, the LCSD had advised the public not to swim there. Because the public took heed of the LCSD's advice, the number of beach goers was low. This showed the LCSD's efforts in safeguarding the health of the beach goers.

8. The Committee further asked about the facilities provided as an alternative to the closed gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District.

9. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** responded that apart from beaches, the LCSD also provided swimming pools which could meet part of the public's swimming needs. The LCSD hoped that the water quality of the closed beaches could be improved as soon as possible so that the beaches could be reopened for public use.

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

10. The **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** added that:
- subject to the conditions of the surrounding environment, the LCSD would provide these beaches with recreational facilities such as barbecue pits. The beaches were, however, unsuitable for swimming due to a number of factors such as poor water quality. The LCSD had liaised with the relevant government departments on whether there were other improvement measures. It had reminded the public of the water quality of these beaches and of the alternative facilities such as swimming pools; and
 - in fact, the overall patronage of the beaches was decreasing while that of the swimming pools was on the rise. This might reflect the different choices of swimmers or the effects of other factors. The LCSD would not reopen the beaches while their water quality was below standard. Apart from urging the relevant departments to improve the water quality, the LCSD met the public's swimming needs by providing other facilities and extending the opening hours of swimming pools, etc.
11. The Committee further asked for documents showing that the LCSD:
- had conveyed to the relevant government departments its concern that four gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District were closed because the water quality of these beaches had deteriorated upon the full commissioning of the Stage 1 of the HATS, and had urged for expedient completion of the improvement works concerned; and
 - had sought additional resources for the provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities in view of the closure of the above beaches, and had taken measures to promote the availability of such facilities.
12. In her letter of 18 May 2004, in *Appendix 49*, the **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** advised that:
- the LCSD was not aware in advance of the adverse impact of the Stage 1 of the HATS on the water quality of the gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District. On 15 January 2003, the LCSD asked the EPD to provide it with a report on the water quality of the gazetted beaches to enable it to determine the opening arrangement of beaches in the swimming season of 2003. This was a normal step to take annually. The EPD informed the LCSD on 22 January 2003 that the water quality of the seven beaches in Tsuen Wan District had

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

deteriorated as a result of the commissioning of the Stage 1 of the HATS and recommended closing all the seven gazetted beaches along the coastal line of Tsuen Wan;

- in anticipation that the Tsuen Wan District Council (TWDC) would have strong reaction to the closure of the beaches, the LCSD expressed its concern to the EPD and requested it to attend the relevant committees of the TWDC in February and March 2003 to explain to the TWDC members the reasons for the deterioration of the water quality and the subsequent closure of these beaches. At a meeting of one of the committees of the TWDC, the EPD admitted that it had not anticipated the deterioration of water quality in Tsuen Wan beaches upon the full commissioning of the Stage 1 of the HATS;
- in view of the closure of the four gazetted beaches, the LCSD had, at the TWDC meetings held in February and March 2003, promoted the use of a number of nearby swimming facilities such as the Ma Wan Tung Wan Beach in Tsuen Wan District and the five beaches in Tuen Mun District, namely the Butterfly, the Kadoorie, the Cafeteria Old, the Cafeteria New and the Golden Beaches. In addition, the LCSD had, also at the same meetings, promoted the use of two public swimming pools in Tsuen Wan, namely the Shing Mun Valley Swimming Pool and the Tsuen King Circuit Wu Chung Swimming Pool; and
- improvement works at the Ma Wan Tung Wan Beach, including re-sanding, renewal of shark prevention net and refurbishment of the beach building, were completed in April and May 2004. The LCSD had set up two new beach volleyball courts at the Lido Beach in July 2003 to promote the use of land based facilities. In addition, the LCSD had produced pamphlets and booklets to introduce the public swimming pools and gazetted beaches managed by it. At the same time, information on these facilities was uploaded to the web page of the LCSD for publicity.

13. The Committee noted from paragraphs 2.5 to 2.7 of the Audit Report that in 2002-03, the LCSD provided 35 established posts (six Amenities Assistant (AA) IIIs and 29 Lifeguards) for eight closed gazetted beaches and redeployed the 29 lifeguards to fill other vacant posts. Audit recommended that the LCSD should consider deleting the lifeguard posts and critically review the need and cost-effectiveness of deploying AA IIIs. In response, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services said that the 29 lifeguard posts had already been frozen. The lifeguards originally filling the posts had been redeployed to fill other vacant posts. If these posts were deleted and the beaches were eventually reopened, new posts would have to be separately created. The LCSD did not see the advantage of

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

deleting the posts at this stage. The department would review the cost-effectiveness of deploying AA IIIs stationed at beaches with low attendance and primitive facilities and the need to retain the AA III post at the Rocky Bay Beach.

14. In view of the fiscal deficit and the absence of a firm timing on the reopening of these beaches, which depended on, inter alia, the progress of the Stage 2 works of the HATS, the Committee queried whether there was a need to retain the lifeguard posts. It therefore asked:

- whether the lifeguard posts would be deleted; if so, when the deletion would be done; if not, the reasons for that; and
- when the review of the cost-effectiveness of deploying six AA IIIs at the eight beaches would be conducted.

15. In her letter of 18 May 2004, the **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** said that:

- in consideration of the recent advice from the EPD that the Stage 2 works of the HATS for improvement of the beach water quality of Tsuen Wan District would take at least 30 months to complete, the LCSD agreed that the lifeguard posts were unlikely to be filled in the near future and the LCSD would delete them; and
- the LCSD had reviewed the cost-effectiveness of deploying six AA IIIs at the eight beaches. The AA III originally stationed at the Rocky Bay Beach had already been redeployed to the Shek O Beach. One AA III would be retained to carry out daily management of the seven beaches in Tsuen Wan District and the other four would be deployed to other leisure venues as soon as possible.

16. According to paragraph 2.12 of the Audit Report, the LCSD would seek the Southern District Council's support before implementing Audit's recommendation to the effect that the less frequently used urban beaches should be closed from November to March each year. However, in response to Audit's recommendation that it should examine whether the Kiu Tsui Beach on Sharp Island in Sai Kung should continue to be designated as a gazetted beach, the LCSD did not mention whether it would consult the relevant District Council in its consideration of whether to de-gazette the beach. It therefore appeared to the Committee that the LCSD adopted two different approaches to this matter.

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

The Committee considered it important that the relevant District Council's views should be sought. It asked when the LCSD would consult the relevant District Council on the respective proposals regarding the urban beaches and the Kiu Tsui Beach.

17. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** explained that the LCSD would consult the Southern District Council on the proposal regarding the urban beaches within two to three months' time. On the proposal regarding the Kiu Tsui Beach, there was a private-sector initiative of developing Sharp Island into a resort. Although there was no problem in the beach water quality, the beach condition was not satisfactory. In fact, the patronage of the Kiu Tsui Beach was decreasing. De-gazetting of the Kiu Tsui Beach would be considered in the future development of Sharp Island in one go. The LCSD would inform the relevant District Council shortly of the development plan and consult it on the matter.

18. The Committee asked whether there was flexibility in deploying staff to man those beaches the patronage of which was low on weekdays but high on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, so that the staffing level at these beaches was commensurate with the patronage.

19. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** responded that the patronage of some beaches, e.g. the Hairpin Beach, was low on weekdays. In fact, there were hardly any swimmers at the Hairpin Beach on weekdays. As such, the LCSD did not provide these beaches with lifeguards except on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

20. In response to the Committee's enquiry, the **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** confirmed that the LCSD had a policy to close these beaches on weekdays and open them on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Swimming pool complexes

21. According to paragraph 3.13 of the Audit Report, in the planning of new swimming pool complexes, the LCSD would provide indoor heated pools instead of outdoor heated pools. The Committee noted that a number of heated pools, the financial proposals for which had been approved by the Legislative Council, would be built in future. It asked whether such pools would be indoor heated pools or indoor heated pools converted from outdoor ones by the provision of a light-weight cover.

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

22. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** replied that two indoor heated swimming pools, one in Tai Kwok Tsui and the other in Hin Tin, would be built. As the public had an increasing interest in swimming during winter months, the LCSD considered that more indoor heated pools should be built to meet their needs. In contrast, the demand for outdoor heated pools was low. As such, the LCSD had plans to convert outdoor heated pools into indoor ones by providing a light-weight cover.

Provision of lifeguards

23. According to paragraphs 5.20 and 5.21 of the Audit Report, the difference in the daily cost of using one volunteer lifeguard and employing one temporary lifeguard was small. In view of the low turnout rates of volunteer lifeguards, Audit considered that the LCSD needed to examine the cost-effectiveness of using the volunteer lifeguards. The Committee asked about the progress of the LCSD's examination.

24. The **Assistant Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Leisure Services) 1** responded that the LCSD had informed the Hong Kong Life Saving Society (HKLSS) that it had stopped using HKLSS's volunteer lifeguards. In the light of the small difference in the cost of using volunteer lifeguards and employing temporary lifeguards, and the fact that the service provided by volunteer lifeguards was training for them to gain experience and acquire higher qualification for life saving, the LCSD considered that the service of HKLSS's volunteer lifeguards should be voluntary in nature and they should not earn daily honorarium at the current high rate. As such, the LCSD had asked the HKLSS to reduce the rate.

25. **Conclusions and recommendations** The Committee:

Gazetted beaches

- expresses concern that in 2002-03, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) provided 35 established posts [6 Amenities Assistant (AA) IIIs and 29 Lifeguards] for eight closed gazetted beaches and redeployed the 29 lifeguards to fill other vacant posts. The eight closed beaches were still manned by six AA IIIs at a staff cost of \$1.6 million in 2002-03;

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

- notes that:
 - (a) the LCSD will delete the 29 lifeguard posts;
 - (b) the LCSD has reviewed the cost-effectiveness of deploying six AA IIIs at the eight beaches. The AA III originally stationed at the Rocky Bay Beach has already been redeployed to the Shek O Beach. One AA III will be retained to carry out daily management of the seven beaches in Tsuen Wan District and the other four would be deployed to other leisure venues as soon as possible;
 - (c) the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services intends to implement Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 2.6(a) and (d), 2.11 and 2.17 of the Audit Report; and
 - (d) the Administration will take interim and long-term measures to improve the water quality of the gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District, which has deteriorated after the full commissioning of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme Stage I;
- considers that the Administration has the responsibility to improve the water quality of the gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District in order that they can be re-opened for public use;
- recommends that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should consult the relevant District Councils (DCs) and the Legislative Council (LegCo) before deciding whether measures should be taken to de-gazette the Rocky Bay Beach;

Swimming pool complexes

- expresses concern that:
 - (a) for swimming pool complexes, the admission fee in the New Territories for non-peak days is lower than that for peak-days, but the admission fees in the urban areas are the same for both peak and non-peak days; and
 - (b) the review on subsidy levels and cost recovery rates for the different types of leisure and cultural services has not been carried out;

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

- notes that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services intends to implement Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 3.7, 3.16, 3.21 and 3.25 of the Audit Report;
- recommends that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should consult the relevant DCs and the LegCo before deciding whether measures should be taken to adjust the admission fees for all swimming pool complexes, shorten the opening hours of outdoor heated pools where the usage is low, and close in November the five swimming pool complexes which are not provided with heated pools;

Water sports centres

- expresses concern about:
 - (a) the absence of a fairer basis for assessing the enrolment rate of water sports centres to provide better management information;
 - (b) the low usage of the Chong Hing Water Sports Centre and the Jockey Club Wong Shek Water Sports Centre, as well as the problem of congestion at the St. Stephen's Beach Water Sports Centre and the Tai Mei Tuk Water Sports Centre; and
 - (c) the availability of spare craft hours at the four water sports centres;
- notes that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services will implement Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 4.15 and 4.21 of the Audit Report;

Provision of lifeguards

- expresses concern that:
 - (a) in 2003, the number of core lifeguards exceeded the optimal size of the core life-saving workforce. During the peak swimming months from June to August 2003, the highest number of lifeguards employed was 1,887, which comprised 980 core lifeguards and 907 non-core lifeguards. The optimal size of the core life-saving workforce should be 944;
 - (b) the core to non-core lifeguard ratios of the 18 Type 1 swimming pool complexes during the peak swimming months in 2002-03 varied considerably, ranging from 0.5:1 to 1.9:1;

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

- (c) the highest average numbers of swimmers per lifeguard during the peak swimming months in 2002-03 for the 18 Type 1 swimming pool complexes varied significantly;
 - (d) during the non-peak swimming months in 2002-03, the daily average patronage of the Mui Wo Swimming Pool and the Sai Kung Swimming Pool were 51 and 218 respectively. Notwithstanding such low patronage, monthly-rated temporary lifeguards were also employed at these complexes;
 - (e) the operating deficit of the Mui Wo Swimming Pool was \$6.5 million in 2002-03; and
 - (f) the operating deficit of the Sai Kung Swimming Pool was \$19 million in 2002-03;
- notes that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services will implement Audit's recommendations in paragraphs 5.17 and 5.22 of the Audit Report;

Deployment of surplus staff during the winter months

- expresses concern that:
 - (a) there was inadequate assurance that the 521 surplus lifeguards and 66 surplus filtration plant artisans were gainfully employed during the winter months in 2002-03. Work records of the mandays spent on individual tasks were not properly maintained in some districts and there were no laid down monitoring procedures on the winter works programme;
 - (b) during the winter months in 2002-03, the participation rate of the surplus lifeguards and filtration plant artisans in the cross-branch/district programme was unsatisfactory; and
 - (c) when most of the gazetted beaches and swimming pool complexes were closed during the winter months in 2002-03, 140 surplus AA grade staff might also be underemployed because of the much reduced workload at their venues;
- notes that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services will implement Audit's recommendations in paragraph 6.8 of the Audit Report; and

Provision of aquatic recreational and sports facilities

Follow-up actions

- wishes to be kept informed of:
 - (a) the progress on and results of the implementation of the interim and long-term measures to improve the water quality of the gazetted beaches in Tsuen Wan District; and
 - (b) the progress on the implementation of Audit's recommendations mentioned in paragraphs 2.6(a) and (d), 2.11, 2.17, 3.7, 3.16, 3.21, 3.25, 4.15, 4.21, 5.17, 5.22 and 6.8 of the Audit Report.