

For Discussion
on 9 March 2010

Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Progress Report of initiatives taken to enhance environmental hygiene
to combat human swine influenza**

Purpose

At its meeting on 14 July 2009, the Finance Committee (FC) of the Legislative Council approved the funding of \$289.8 million for the Drainage Services Department (DSD), the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), the Home Affairs Department (HAD), the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to launch a series of environmental hygiene improvement initiatives in the combat against human swine influenza (HSI). The initiatives would last for a period of 12 months. At the same time, the Administration also allocated an additional \$6 million and \$4.2 million respectively to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Marine Department (MD) to step up the work on enhancing environmental hygiene. The Food and Health Bureau undertook to report the work progress of the departments to the Legislative Council nine months after funding approval. This paper sets out the relevant information in this regard for Members' reference.

Measures to step up environmental hygiene

2. After funding approval by the FC, the departments commenced work in the second half of 2009 in accordance with the work plans and relevant targets as pledged in the funding proposal. The work progress of the departments is as follows:

Drainage Services Department

3. DSD has, as originally planned, carried out additional cleansing works to underground drains and sewers in blockage-prone areas, including the rear lanes in congested old urban areas (such as Mong Kok and Wan Chai). The frequency of cleansing works conducted in these places has increased from three or four times a year to about six times a year. In addition, DSD has also increased the frequency of cleansing works conducted to the downstream drains and sewers of all hospitals, major Government clinics and public markets from one to two times a year to about three times

a year. The aim of the above initiative is to minimise the risk of occurrence of unhygienic sewage overflows.

4. The estimated expenditure for the whole project is \$15.5 million. As at 31 January 2010, DSD has already issued works orders at a total value of about \$9 million, amounting to 58% of the estimated expenditure. The progress is in order. The total length of the underground drains and sewers to which additional cleansing works have been carried out is approximately 94 kilometres. To gauge the effectiveness of the additional cleansing, DSD has compared the complaint figures on blockage of sewers and drains in blockage-prone areas (including Mong Kok, Wan Chai, Shau Kei Wan and Chai Wan) for the period from October 2009 to January 2010 with those of the same period in the previous year. It is found that the number of complaint cases for the aforesaid period is 1 233, about 47% less than the 2 332 cases recorded in the same period of the previous year.

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

5. FEHD utilises its \$99 million funding mainly on: (1) enhancing cleansing and disinfection services in public markets; (2) enhancing street washing services; (3) enhancing the clean-up of environmental hygiene black spots; (4) providing one-off clean-up services to common areas of private buildings without management bodies; (5) enhancing cleansing services for aqua privies and public toilets; and (6) stepping up publicity and educational programmes on personal, domestic and environmental hygiene.

6. With regard to public markets, FEHD has enhanced the cleansing and disinfection services in the 104 public markets under its management, including (1) hourly disinfection of handrails of escalators/staircases and button key panels of passenger and goods lifts as well as replacement of the sterile plastic sheets over the button key panels on a need basis; (2) enhanced cleansing and disinfection of common areas of markets, including loading/unloading areas, refuse collection points, vacant stalls and staircases after the last cleansing operation of each day; (3) cleansing of market toilets not less than six times a day, including disinfection of toilet floor and toilet facilities; and (4) disinfection of other common facilities in markets (such as tables and chairs in common areas) twice a day.

7. Another highlight of FEHD's work is enhancing street washing services and cleansing work in environmental hygiene black spots. In this regard, FEHD has used high pressure hot water cleaners to enhance street washing services regularly and removed the stubborn dirt, grease and chewing gum deposits, etc. from 826 problematic

back lanes in the vicinity of food premises, hawker concentrated areas and public markets. Concerning the clean-up of environmental hygiene black spots, as stated in the document submitted to the FC in July 2009, FEHD had identified 105 environmental hygiene black spots in consultation with District Councils (DCs) in July 2009. As at 31 January 2010, 100 of these black spots have been removed from the list after thorough cleansing. The remaining five black spots are expected to be removed from the list shortly after another round of cleansing operation. FEHD will closely monitor the environmental hygiene condition in these areas and provide additional cleansing services as and when necessary to maintain a clean environment.

8. FEHD has also thoroughly cleansed the roofs, staircases, lightwells and other common parts of 1,760 private buildings without property management bodies, removing a total of 137 tonnes of waste. The overall hygiene condition has been enhanced.

9. Besides, FEHD has enhanced the cleansing services of 562 aqua privies and public toilets without attendants, including increasing the daily cleansing from one or two times previously to three times and the weekly thorough deep cleansing from once to twice.

10. FEHD has also conducted publicity and public education programmes to bring forth the message of keeping personal, domestic and environmental hygiene to the public (including foreign domestic helpers, new immigrants and ethnic minorities). The publicity programmes include: (1) four “Maintain Hygiene for a Healthy Life Activity Day” were held in different districts from October 2009 to January 2010 respectively. The activity was aimed at promoting personal and environmental hygiene messages to targeted groups, including foreign domestic helpers and new immigrants; (2) 100 000 copies of a booklet prepared in nine Southeast Asian languages to promote personal and domestic hygiene messages were distributed to schools admitting non-Chinese speaking children, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) serving ethnic minorities, and district offices of HAD and FEHD. In addition, 40 000 bookmarks with personal and environmental hygiene messages were distributed to schools admitting non-Chinese speaking children; (3) roving exhibitions and game booths on personal and domestic hygiene were held in more than 50 public markets, and talks and cooking demonstrations on anti-flu dietetic therapy were held in 30 public markets; and (4) cleansing packs were distributed to tenants of all 104 public markets and cooked food markets in the territory as well as visitors to the Health Education Exhibition and Resource Centre.

11. As at 31 January 2010, the amount committed by FEHD to implement the above measures is about \$72 million.

Home Affairs Department

12. HAD will utilise its \$41.2 million funding to implement environmental hygiene improvement measures and community involvement projects. On conducting cleansing work in the community, HAD has engaged contractors/NGOs to provide cleansing services for the common areas of private buildings without management bodies and the dwelling places of the under-privileged so as to improve the hygiene conditions and to appeal to the owners to up-keep the cleanliness of their premises. About 1 100 buildings and 13 000 households have benefited from such cleansing services.

13. HAD has created 49 temporary jobs, including 20 Community Organisers, 11 Project Assistants, 4 Project Coordinators and 14 Project Executives for one year to support and assist in organising and implementing community involvement events. NGOs and contractors were also engaged as necessary in implementing these projects, and 150 temporary jobs have been created for one year.

14. Moreover, HAD has been conducting various promotional activities. It has joined hands with the DCs and residents organisations (such as owners' committees and mutual aid committees) to carry out district-based activities, as well as mobilised volunteers to reach out to the needy to disseminate information on flu pandemic and assist in household cleansing. Promotional materials, including banners and posters, were displayed by the DCs across the territory. Over 300 promotional events on personal/environmental hygiene, such as seminars and roving exhibitions, have been organised in various districts. In addition, television and radio announcement in the public interests were launched in June 2009.

15. HAD has committed about \$20 million to implement the above measures as at 31 January 2010.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

16. The utilisation of LCSD's \$39.1 million funding is mainly on further strengthening cleansing and disinfection services in leisure and cultural venues with high patronage as well as employing Health Ambassadors (HAs) at these venues to help step up environmental hygiene and related work on public education and promotion.

17. With regard to the cleansing of leisure and cultural venues, LCSD has stepped up the thorough cleansing and disinfection of around 600 parks and playgrounds since September 2009. Through the engagement of additional mobile cleaners by LCSD cleansing contractors, the cleansing frequency of LCSD parks and playgrounds has been increased from once or twice a month to at least once a week. The thorough cleansing and disinfection work of children's playground and equipment, elderly fitness equipment, pebble walking trails, garden benches, arbours, chess tables, refuse collection bins, drains, etc. has also been increased from once to at least twice daily. As a result, the cleanliness of the leisure venues, particularly those without on-site cleaners, has noticeably improved.

18. LCSD has also engaged additional cleaners to step up the cleansing of computer workstations for public use at the Hong Kong Central Library and other public libraries. In particular, the cleansing frequency for computer peripherals, including keyboards, mice, writing pads, headphones, etc. with diluted bleach (1:99) has been increased from once daily to once every hour.

19. Concerning the work on employing HAs to promote HSI precautionary measures at leisure and cultural venues, LCSD has since 2009 employed around 100 HAs to work in 23 indoor sports centres, 29 major parks/playgrounds/holiday camps/outdoor recreation and sports centres, 34 public libraries, 12 indoor stadia and performing arts venues, and 8 public museums. The major duties of the HAs are to disseminate messages to the venue/facility users on the fight against HSI, promote the importance of personal health and hygiene, directly respond to users' enquiries, maintain environmental hygiene of the venues and inspect the cleansing and disinfection work at the venues.

20. To ensure the service quality of the HAs, LCSD has organised a range of training programmes for the HAs including induction training, training on preventive measures against HSI and customer service training. The service of the HAs is well-received by venue/facility users who have become more alert to personal and environmental hygiene. For example, children would clean their hands before entering the children's play room. The HAs are also provided with working gear including surgical masks and alcohol swabs for distribution to venue/facility users in need. The HAs will continue to strengthen the monitoring work over the cleansing and disinfection of venues and enhance their efforts in explaining the importance of the fight against HSI to the public.

21. As at 31 January 2010, LCSD has committed about \$10.2 million on the above measures.

Social Welfare Department

22. SWD will utilise the \$95 million funding to provide additional resources for some 1 800 welfare service units (including around 600 residential welfare service units and around 1 200 day welfare service units) to hire additional cleansing service or employ part-time or temporary helping hands to strengthen general cleansing service and enhance environmental hygiene as appropriate.

23. The aim is to increase the capability of welfare service units in the prevention of infections among service users and staff. The first instalment of \$44.37 million was released to 365 welfare organisations covering about 1 800 service units in September 2009. According to the Interim Performance Reports submitted by these welfare organisations, as at 31 January 2010, a total of about \$8.42 million was spent on hiring of cleansing service from contractors, about \$16.26 million on employing part-time/full-time temporary cleansing workers, and about \$1.78 million on purchasing cleansing products and related materials. The total number of part-time/full-time temporary cleansing workers employed is 1 550.

24. The welfare organisations will continue to make use of the unspent allocation to enhance the environmental hygiene of their service units in the coming six months. The last instalment of the funding will be released to these welfare organisations in March 2010.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

25. The \$6 million funding for AFCD is mainly utilised on maintaining and improving the cleanliness of country park facilities, and improving the environmental hygiene of wholesale food markets under its management.

26. With regard to enhancing the cleansing of country park facilities, AFCD has engaged the cleansing contractors to strengthen cleansing works at country parks (including Ma Shi Chau Special Area, Kiu Tsui, East Dam of High Island Reservoir and Nam Shan Camp site) and refuse accumulation sites near recreational facilities. AFCD has also started to improve the hygiene facilities at country parks, including the provision of 10 more mobile toilets at the East Dam of High Island Reservoir, Needle Hill, Plover Cover Country Park Visitor Centre and Shui Chuen O Street and the installation of automatic cleansing facilities (e.g. water taps, soap dispensers, hand dryers and disinfectant dispenser) in fixed toilets.

27. On strengthening the hygiene measures at the three Government wholesale food markets, AFCD has requested the cleansing contractors to provide additional manpower to enhance the hygiene conditions of about 37 public toilets located at various wholesale food markets and to increase the frequency of daily cleansing services in the wholesale food markets (from four times to six times), daily refuse collection (from one/two times to two/three times), daily cleansing/disinfection of lifts (from three times to six times), cleansing of drainage and roads (from once a week to twice a week) and cleansing of sewage pump stations (from once a month to twice a month).

28. As at 31 January 2010, AFCD's has committed around \$2.8 million to implement the above measures.

Marine Department

29. MD will utilise \$4.2 million funding to maintain and improve the environmental hygiene of cross-boundary ferry terminals, marine refuse collection points and other concerned water areas.

30. In relation to providing additional cleansing services to cross-boundary ferry terminals, more cleaners have been deployed to and additional cleansing services provided for passenger toilets at the Macau Ferry Terminal and China Ferry Terminal since 1 August 2009. The hygiene condition and cleanliness at these places are enhanced and found satisfactory. Besides, newly made steel rubbish recycling bins were placed in both terminals in September 2009. The first thorough cleansing and washing exercise at both terminals was carried out in September 2009 to enhance their hygiene condition and cleanliness. The second round has been scheduled for March 2010.

31. To improve the environmental hygiene in marine refuse collection points and other concerned water areas, MD has set up a special team of 14 persons on 1 August 2009 to enhance refuse scavenging at littoral foreshore areas. The special team has since then collected 258 tonnes of refuse. Besides, MD has procured six sets of high pressure hot water spray guns in September 2009 and the relevant operation training has completed. Daily intensive cleansing with the high pressure hot water spray guns at marine refuse collection points has commenced.

32. As at 31 January 2010, MD has committed around \$4 million on the above measures.

Figures on job creation

33. During the discussion on the funding proposal, some Panel and FC Members were concerned about the number of jobs that would be created as a result of implementation of the above measures. As at 31 January 2010, the seven departments have created a total of more than 2 700 temporary positions for implementing the various initiatives.

Advice Sought

34. Members are invited to note the work progress of the various measures set out in this paper.

Food and Health Bureau
March 2010