

Panel on Development

Progress Report on the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme and the Proposed Creation of a Permanent Post of Assistant Director/Mandatory Building Inspection in the Buildings Department

Follow-up Issues of the Meeting held on 26 November 2013

At the meeting on 26 November 2013, the Panel on Development discussed the latest progress of the implementation of the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme (MWIS), and the proposal to create a permanent post of Assistant Director/Mandatory Building Inspection (AD/MBI) in the Buildings Department (BD) with effect from 1 April 2014 upon the lapse of the existing supernumerary AD/MBI post. This note sets out our response to the issues raised on which we have undertaken to revert to the Panel.

Manpower Deployment in BD

2. Some members enquired about the manpower deployment in BD to cope with various measures introduced since 2011 to enhance building safety. To support the implementation of a multi-pronged package of measures on building safety, a total of 323 civil service posts were created in BD in the past three financial years from 2011-12 to 2013-14, including two directorate posts and 321 non-directorate posts. The non-directorate posts comprise 123 professional posts, 95 technical posts and 103 general grades posts. The establishment of BD was increased from 996 on 1 April 2011 to 1 319 on 1 November 2013, representing an increase of 32%. There was also an increase of over 30% in the establishment of both the professional and technical grades during the same period. The number of civil service posts of the two technical grades (i.e. Survey Officer and Technical Officer grades) in the department was increased from 308 to 403, and the number of civil service posts of the two professional grades (i.e. Building Surveyor and Structural Engineer grades) rose from 374 to 499.

3. The above posts were created to support the implementation of various initiatives, including the MBIS and the MWIS, large-scale

operations for removal of unauthorised building works (UBWs) and against irregularities of building works associated with domestic sub-divided flats, Minor Works Control System, Signboard Control System, enforcement action against UBWs in New Territories Exempted Houses, public education and publicity programmes, research and development, audit functions as well as other support services. At present, the resources of about 650 professional, technical and supporting staff of the two Existing Buildings Divisions and the Mandatory Building Inspection Division of BD are being deployed to implement the MBIS and the MWIS in addition to their other duties to provide support to the department's building safety and maintenance programme.

4. In 2014-15, in addition to the proposed AD/MBI post, about 190 non-directorate civil service posts¹ comprising professional and technical posts and other support staff will be created in various divisions of BD to further enhance the delivery of the multi-pronged package of measures on building safety, including the MBIS and the MWIS.

5. Apart from the provision of manpower resources, BD will continue to streamline operational procedures to improve efficiency and re-prioritise its work. For example, for the MBIS, it was originally intended that separate statutory notices would be issued to each projection of the buildings. Considering the large number of statutory notices required to be served, BD rationalised the interpretation of projections in May 2013 such that some of the projections would be regarded as part of the common parts or external walls of a building for the purpose of issuing statutory notices. This has substantially reduced the number of statutory notices required to be served under the MBIS by about 50%. Other streamlining measures being considered include simplifying the notification process by amalgamating separate specified forms for appointment of qualified persons (QPs) and completion of prescribed inspection and/or prescribed repair; e-Form submissions to facilitate data entry; and setting up a dedicated service counter for receipt, verification and acknowledgement of submissions from Registered Inspectors (RIs) and QPs.

6. The BD management will also continue to maintain close dialogue with its staff to better understand their concerns and provide better support. BD has put in place various communications channels, including regular meetings at various levels, so that staff can express their views effectively and directly while the department can obtain a holistic

¹ Some of the posts are to be converted from existing non-civil service contract positions.

picture of the problems faced by staff and take follow-up actions and make responses in a prompt and comprehensive manner.

Selection Criteria for Target Buildings

7. At the last meeting, a Member enquired about the selection criteria for target buildings under the MBIS and MWIS. BD has established a selection panel, which comprises representatives from professional institutions, relevant non-governmental organisations, property management professionals, District Councils and relevant government departments, to tender advice on the selection of target buildings for the schemes. On a general note, we would like to emphasise that, founded on the principle of “prevention is better than cure”, the MBIS and MWIS aim to require owners to carry out regular inspection and timely repair for their properties so as to tackle the problem of building neglect at source. It is therefore not the objective of the schemes that a building is included in the schemes only when it has become defective or dangerous.

8. Target buildings in the 18 District Council districts will be selected having regard to the respective proportion of the number of eligible buildings in the district over the total number of such buildings in the territory. Relevant factors such as the maintenance conditions and repair records of the buildings and windows, the traffic and pedestrian flows adjoining the buildings, location and building clusters, and the buildings nominated by the District Councils will be taken into account in the selection process. Priority will be given to buildings with more dilapidation and defects in the common parts and on the external walls, buildings with more exterior UBWs, and buildings abutting streets with heavy pedestrian or traffic flows. In fact, according to BD’s records, there were reports on dilapidation or window falling incidents in younger buildings while some older buildings are well-maintained in good structural conditions. The selected target buildings for each year will therefore represent a mix of buildings in different conditions and age profiles in different districts.

Supply of Service Providers for MBIS and MWIS

9. Some Members raised concern over the adequacy of service providers to support the implementation of the MBIS and MWIS. At present, there are 383 RIs for the MBIS and about 16 300 QPs under the MWIS. The QPs include authorized persons, registered structural engineers, registered general building contractors and registered minor

works contractors registered for the class, type and item of minor works in respect of windows. For the MWIS, recognising that not all practitioners among QPs may be interested in providing window inspection services and to facilitate owners in selection of QP, BD has written to all QPs to invite them to indicate interest in providing services under the MWIS. There are currently about 2 000 QPs who have expressed interest and, for easy identification of these QPs by the public, a remark has been added to the names of these QPs on the list of QPs on BD's website. BD has also actively explored with relevant professional institutes, contractor associations and trade organisations on how best to provide relevant information to the public. The organisations have compiled lists of their members interested in providing services under the MWIS and the hyperlinks to the lists are uploaded onto the BD's website for easy reference of the public. As an ongoing effort, BD will continue to invite these organisations to encourage their members to provide services under the MWIS. BD will also continue to promote the MBIS and the MWIS in the industry by arranging briefing sessions for qualified practitioners.

**Development Bureau
Buildings Department
December 2013**