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Our Ref. : FEHD Hy/34-105/5/4 C

9 January 2017

Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Complex
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(Attn.: Mr Anthony CHU)

By Post & Email

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Dear Mr CHU,

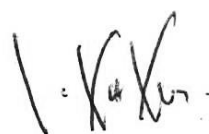
Public Accounts Committee

Consideration of Chapter 9 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 67

Joint-office operation on water seepage in buildings

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 2016. We are pleased to provide our response / information to the questions as per copy in the Appendix.

Yours sincerely,



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encl.

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**Report No. 67 of the Director of Audit
Chapter 9 : Joint-office Operation on Water Seepage in Buildings
Questions and Requested Information**

Replies by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD)

Part 2 : Investigation and Enforcement Actions

Referral Mechanism

- 1. It is stated in para. 2.9 of the Audit Report that one of the objectives of the joint-office operation is to improve the success rate of identifying the source of water seepage of cases reported by the public. Figure 2 shows that the success rates, however, had decreased progressively from 46% in 2007 to 36% in 2015. Does the Government agree that the decrease in the success rate of identifying the source of water seepage requires attention? What improvement measures will be taken by the Government to increase the success rate of identifying the source of water seepage?**

The Audit Report states that after the establishment of the Joint Office formed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Buildings Department (Joint Office), the success rate of identifying the source of water seepage had decreased progressively from 46% in 2007 to 36% in 2015. The Government, after review, summarised the major reasons of decrease as follows:

- (1) In recent years, the public has become more aware of the services provided by Joint Office and less tolerant of the water seepage having a lower moisture-content level. Hence, the public's demand for Joint Office's services has increased considerably. This is reflected in the significant increase in the number of cases reported by the public from 17 405 in 2007 to 29 617 in 2015; and
- (2) The Buildings Department (BD) has been conducting periodic reviews on the success rate of the water seepage cases handled by the Joint Office. The reviews revealed that the higher the moisture content level of the seepage area, the more the number of successful cases. In addition, the BD had recently

conducted a sample survey of some 100 screen-in cases completed from 2006 and 2016 and noted that the proportion of low moisture-content cases (between 35% and 50%) cases has increased drastically from about 1:30 in the period from 2007 to 2009 to about 1:4 after 2009, thus leading to a decrease in the success rate.

To address the challenge of dealing with water seepage cases at low moisture-content level, the BD has commissioned a consultancy study on the latest technological methods for identifying the source of water seepage in buildings in 2014. The consultant will assess and recommend the most suitable testing methods as well as help formulate technical guidelines for use by the Joint Office for handling water seepage cases. The study will be completed by 2017.

- 2. According to paragraph 2.9, another objective of the joint-office operations was to shorten the time of investigations of cases reported by the public. Paragraphs 2.17 and 2.18, however, showed that of the 28 332 cases having actions completed from April 2015 to March 2016, the time taken to complete 9 710 (34%) cases had exceeded the total reference completion timeframe of 133 days. In particular, 643 (2%) cases had taken 2.2 to 7.5 years to complete. Furthermore, of the 15 564 outstanding cases with actions not having been completed as of March 2016, the time used for handling 6 368 (41%) cases had exceeded the total reference completion timeframe of 133 days, where the time having been spent on 1 046 (7%) cases ranged from 2.2 to 8.3 years. Does the Government agree that it is unsatisfactory that the joint-office operations carried out by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) had taken a long time to complete which may lead to prolonged nuisances for the public in question and concerns over the Government's efficiency and effectiveness in taking enforcement actions under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132)? What measures will the Government take to improve the situation?**

The significant increase in the number of water seepage case reports in recent years has resulted in a surge in Joint Office's workload and a longer time in completing the cases, especially the complicated ones. In addition, before the Joint Office operation became a permanent arrangement in April 2014, the majority of BD Joint Office staff was contract staff whose turnover rate was high due to grim career prospects. As a result, work efficiency was affected and a large amount of backlog cases were created in the early stage. Besides, manpower strength and staff's experience by then were

unsatisfactory. With a more stable workforce being progressively established since April 2014, the performance of the Joint Office had improved.

The guidelines about completing the investigation of water seepage cases normally within 90 working days (i.e. about 133 calendar days) provide indicate timeframes for simple and straightforward cases where the co-operation of the concerned owners/occupiers are obtained (i.e. cases not involving any problem for investigators to gain access to the premises concerned, not involving difficulties to trace the seepage source, not involving multiple seepage sources nor multiple tests and not requiring Government Laboratory's confirmation of results of seepage-source tests). In complicated cases (e.g. those involving more than one bathroom or several seepage locations), multiple visits for investigation and tests will be required. In some special cases, additional visits to the complainant's premises may be required for confirming the test results or monitoring any changes in the seepage condition. The actual timeframe for completing a case will vary depending on the complexity of the case, the testing methods used, and the workload and manpower situation of the Joint Office. A case will require longer time to complete if it involves laboratory testing of samples, sub-divided flats or if an application for an entry warrant from the Court is needed.

The Administration also finds it less than satisfactory that Joint Office takes a long time to handle some water seepage cases, as pointed out in the Audit Report, and agrees that there is room for improvement. In recent years, the continual increase in the cases of reports on water seepage in buildings and the uncooperative attitude of individual occupiers under complaint who rejected Joint Office staff's entry for investigation and made unreasonable requests have led to an increase in the workload of the investigators and their time spent on paperwork, resulting in longer processing time. Nevertheless, as highlighted in paras. 2.15 and 2.16 of the Audit Report, Joint Office has set reference completion timeframes for simple and straightforward cases to monitor the investigation progress.

To enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Joint Office, FEHD and BD are taking measures to optimise the Complaints Management Information System (CMIS), so as to improve the Joint Office staff's performance in monitoring investigation progress and ensuring timely actions by contractors. Moreover, in recent years, Joint Office has been proactively seeking resources to convert the current non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff positions to civil service grades, in a bid to lower the turnover rates and enhance the efficiency. Besides, Joint Office has stepped up its publicity

efforts regarding the handling of water seepage in buildings, so that the public will clearly understand that proper management and maintenance of buildings are the responsibilities of every property owner. If water seepage is found in buildings, the owners should first arrange their own investigation of the cause of seepage, and co-ordinate with the occupants and owners concerned for conducting repair works as soon as possible.

- 3. According to para 2.13, for a screen-out case, the FEHD has set a completion timeframe on sending a final reply to the informant within 18 working days from the time of receiving the related water seepage public report. However, the FEHD's CMIS did not maintain information on the time of sending final replies to informants of screen-out cases. Does the FEHD agree that the absence of related information has impeded the FEHD's monitoring and Audit's examination of the timeliness and completeness of the FEHD's actions in handling screen-out cases? How will FEHD improve the situation?**

Currently, the FEHD's CMIS does not keep record of whether final replies were sent to informants of screen-out cases within the set 18 working days (i.e. about 27 calendar days). The FEHD Administrative Circular on Handling of Complaints requires supervisors to oversee the progress of cases (including water seepage cases) undertaken by their subordinates, and conduct sample checks to ensure that complaint cases are handled appropriately, and properly and timely recorded in the CMIS. According to the above Administrative Circular, after issuing an interim reply to the complainant, the Case Officer should aim at issuing a substantive reply within 30 calendar days upon receipt of the complaint.

The Government agrees with the Audit Report which states that keeping the relevant information can effectively assist Joint Office to monitor the progress of such cases. To handle and monitor the progress of screen-out cases in a timely manner, FEHD is now reviewing the existing CMIS for water seepage cases, and will consider keeping the relevant information, so that the CMIS will be able to record the time of sending final replies to the informants of screen-out cases. The FEHD will also request Joint Office staff to upload the date of issuing final replies to informants to the CMIS for record.

- 4. It is mentioned in Paragraph 2.29 that according to the FEHD guidelines, in referring a case to another department, FEHD Joint Office staff will send a memorandum together with the relevant information to the related department, and record the referrals in a list of referral cases. However, when the list of referral**

cases for the period from January 2015 to March 2016 was examined, FEHD could only provide Audit with the list of referral cases for 11 districts only. The remaining 8 districts which did not keep the list of referral cases are:

Kowloon City, Kwai Tsing, Kwun Tong, Sai Kung, Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, Wanchai and Wong Tai Sin.

Has FEHD followed up on the reasons why the said districts failed to implement the guidelines? If yes, what are the reasons? Will FEHD conduct a thorough review on the monitoring mechanism and make improvement, or are there other improvement measures in place?

- 5. Further to the above question, when did the above FEHD's guidelines come into effect? Has FEHD regularly monitored the implementation of the guidelines since it came into effect? What are the last dates of records which are still kept by the above 8 districts? Why no such records are kept after those dates? Has FEHD investigated whether maladministration was involved? Has any responsible officer being punished?**

4 and 5

According to the operational guidelines issued by FEHD in 2006, Joint Office staff members, when referring a case to another department, are required to issue a memo and provide relevant information to the department concerned and keep a record on the list of referral cases. As the above operational guidelines do not set out the specified format of such list and the information required, some staff of individual DOs only put the information on cases referred to other departments in separate paper files. As a result, the 8 relevant DOs failed to promptly provide the Audit Commission with the properly organised list of referral cases. Besides, the keeping of relevant information as required by the above operational guidelines is mainly for record purpose and FEHD does not conduct random checks regularly in this respect. Regarding the FEHD/ Joint Office's inadequate system for referring cases to other departments as pointed out in the Audit Report, the Government has agreed with the amendment to the relevant guidelines by which the format of the list and the information required will be provided. Frontline staff has also been reminded to keep the list of referral cases in accordance with FEHD's guidelines. To improve work efficiency, FEHD will develop a management information system which, among other things, can maintain the information on cases referred to other departments and facilitate the keeping of records of case referral by Joint Office staff. It will also allow Joint Office to retrieve information directly from the system and

to print out the list of referral cases regularly which will be sent to relevant departments for reconciliation purposes.

- 6. Table 3 in paragraph 2.31 of the Audit Report shows the number of water seepage cases that had been referred by the Joint Office operation to BD and the Water Supplies Department (WSD) for follow-up actions. However, paragraph 2.31 shows that FEHD and BD informed Audit in July 2016 that they were unable to provide Audit with information related to the water seepage cases that had been referred to the BD Existing Buildings Divisions under the Joint Office operation. Moreover, there are substantial discrepancies between the records of Joint Office operation and those of WSD, which fails to serve the purpose of conducting reconciliation in respect of the progress of cases. Is it the reason for the unsatisfactory result of the Joint Office operation?**

During investigation, if the Joint Office has found that the seepage has given rise to building-safety issue and/ or the seepage is originated from leaking water-supply pipes, it will refer the seepage case to the responsible departments to take follow-up actions within their respective purview according to the inter-departmental arrangement. Meanwhile, the Joint Office will continue and complete the investigation under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132). The respective departments will start following up the cases upon receiving Joint Office's referral and will reply to the informant in writing direct with a copy to Joint Office for reference. As such, the Joint Office can check the progress of the follow-up actions from the case file.

- 7. Further to the above question, when did the FEHD's requirement of keeping the list of referral cases come into effect? Has FEHD regularly monitored the list of referral cases since the requirement came into effect? What are the last dates of records which are still kept by FEHD? Why has FEHD not kept such records after that date? Has FEHD investigated whether maladministration was involved? Has any responsible officer being punished?**

Regarding the reports of water seepage in buildings, where the water seepage poses a risk to the structural safety of the building or results in wastage of water, the Government will intervene and handle the case in accordance with the powers conferred by the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) or the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap. 102) respectively.

According to the operational guidelines issued by FEHD, when it is necessary to refer a case involving leakage of water pipes to WSD, Joint Office staff under FEHD will deliver

a memorandum to WSD directly. As for a case referred to the Existing Buildings Divisions (EBD) of BD, it should be first submitted to BD Joint Office staff for their vetting. After determining that it is well-justified, BD Joint Office staff will refer the case to the EBD of BD for follow-up. The operational guidelines do not set out the specified format of the list of referral cases and the information required, and do not require staff members to submit the list of referral cases to WSD and the EBD of BD for reconciliation purposes in a timely manner. As a result, some staff members of individual DOs only put the information on cases referred to other departments in separate paper files. Besides, the keeping of relevant information as required by the above operational guidelines is mainly for record purpose and FEHD does not conduct random checks regularly in this respect.

The substantial discrepancies between the records of referral cases kept by Joint Office and those recorded by WSD were due to the different bases adopted by Joint Office and WSD in classifying a referral case. The number of cases based on records of Joint Office was the number of completed cases with seepage source found to be originated from water-supply pipes. The number did not include other cases having been referred to WSD (e.g. cases requested by informants to be referred to WSD which did not involve water seepage from water-supply pipes).

The Government agrees to the Audit Report's recommendation that the list of referral cases should be submitted to WSD and the EBD of BD regularly for reconciliation purposes. To improve work efficiency, FEHD is now planning to update the management information system concerned, which, among other things, can maintain the information on cases referred to WSD and EBD of the BD and facilitate the keeping of records of case referral by Joint Office staff. It will also allow Joint Office to retrieve information directly from the system and to print out the list of referral cases regularly which will be sent to WSD and EBD of the BD for reconciliation purposes.

Problems regarding the records of seepage cases and nuisance notices

- 8. It is stated in para. 2.46 of the Report that in March 2008, FEHD promulgated an instruction requiring Joint Office staff of the 19 districts to maintain in each district a Water-seepage Case Monitoring (WCM) Database by using standalone computers for monitoring the progress of actions taken on water seepage cases. However, according to 2.47 of the Report, FEHD could not provide Audit with the database information. What is the reason for that? Does FEHD agree that the absence of the related information has impeded FEHD's monitoring and management of**

investigations, issuance of nuisance notices on water seepage cases, as well as Audit examination of the timeliness and completeness of actions taken by the joint-office operation in conducting investigations and issuing nuisance notices? How will FEHD improve the situation?

10. Further to the question above, according to para. 4.4, the new CMIS was rolled out by phases in December 2014 for implementation in the 19 FEHD districts. If the operation of WCM Database was affected by the implementation of the new CMIS, why was it impossible for FEHD to provide the records between March 2008 and December 2014? Has FEHD investigated whether maladministration was involved? Has any responsible officer being punished?

11. After December 2014, some problems were found in the implementation of the new CMIS. Why did they also affect the operation of WCM Database and even result in loss of records? Can FEHD explain this in details? Has FEHD investigated whether maladministration was involved? Has any responsible officer being punished?

8, 10 & 11

According to the guidelines issued in early 2008, Joint Office staff of the 19 districts should maintain in each district a WCM Database by using standalone computers to monitor the progress of actions taken on water seepage cases. The computer system was set up with the aim of facilitating the monitoring of investigation work of each water seepage case by the management staff in the respective districts. As the computer system was designed simply for keeping information in a standalone computer in the district concerned, staff of the district concerned had always had to wait in line to input the information that they had into the system (i.e. no more than one staff could input the information each time. As result, some staff were unable to input the information that they had into the system in a timely manner), which caused obstructions to the use of system by staff. Besides, during the above period of time, most of the Joint Office staff in the District Offices were contract staff. Given their high turnover rate, the continuity of the work was easily affected. The above also contributed to the staff's failure or delay in inputting the investigation information of the water seepage cases, affecting the completeness of the integrity of the Database to a certain extent. Due to the reasons above, in order to effectively record the investigation progress of each water seepage case and timely monitor the follow-up of cases, staff in some districts have changed the above forms into a spreadsheet to maintain a database which can better meet their actual needs. Such spreadsheet is kept in work computers for easy reference and for submission of

monthly returns to the FEHD Headquarters. As a result, some districts have adopted different formats in storing information on the investigation progress of water seepage cases in the work computers. Thus FEHD has failed to respond to Audit's request for a complete record in a standard format of the WCM Databases.

The Government shares the view of the Audit Report about the inadequacies of the WCM Databases maintained in the computer systems in the respective districts. FEHD has started to review the departmental instruction issued in March 2008 on maintaining the WCM Databases, and whether the Databases have been maintained in full compliance with the instruction, and will take necessary actions on proper maintenance of the Databases. Measures will also be taken to ensure that all related information in the system is updated in a timely manner. FEHD has also started to develop more effective and technically feasible means to capture data which will be useful for monitoring the progress of various actions taken on water seepage cases. In the long term, FEHD will explore means to enhance the existing CMIS or set up a new database system to capture information relating to the issuance of nuisance notices, in order to replace the current practice of recording information related to water seepage cases by using different WCM Databases and referral lists. By doing so, it will reduce the time it takes for frontline staff to log into different systems before inputting the information related to water seepage cases. It will also ensure the completeness of the information and improve the work efficiency.

The Government has investigated and found that Joint Office staff of FEHD maintained the data related to the handling of water seepage cases. At present, the process of handling water seepage cases in buildings is recorded clearly in paper files. Therefore, the investigation result showed that non-compliance was not found among Joint Office staff and no disciplinary action was taken.

9. In paragraph 2.48 of the Report, FEHD explained that some features of the WCM Database had been incorporated into the new CMIS. However, problems had been encountered when implementing the new CMIS. What are the problems? Have the problems been solved?

It is more complex to handle water seepage cases than other complaints. For example, an individual case may involve several sub-divided flats and therefore a number of layout plans and the photographs showing potential seepage area(s) in each flat in different investigation stages have to be kept on file. Also, in handling the cases, it is often necessary to refer to different layout plans and photographs at the same time.

From December 2014 onwards, FEHD has rolled out the new CMIS by phases for implementation in the 19 FEHD districts. During the period, FEHD frontline staff expressed their views that adopting the new CMIS to replace paper files in handling water seepage cases had increased their workload and it was time-consuming to handle the information. Frontline staff had to spend considerable time to scan and upload documents, especially the large ones. As a result, efficiency and effectiveness of the handling of the cases had been adversely affected.

Case officers are required to make reference to previous reports and other documents. It is often cumbersome and inefficient to retrieve files from the computer system and to fully replace paper files with a new system in handling water seepage cases. When preparing for prosecution actions for a case, original documents may need to be located for the purpose. It will be faster and more effective to follow the usual practice of opening a paper file when starting to handle a case, which will be used later for the relevant internal procedures.

In mid-July 2015, after extensively consulting frontline staff and thoroughly reviewing the system functions, the work processes and nature of the cases and operational needs, FEHD decided that Joint Office would ensure the proper follow-up on water seepage cases using paper files. Besides, the CMIS would be used for the record of progress of water seepage cases and for appropriate monitoring. FEHD considered it appropriate to adopt a pragmatic approach to implement the above-mentioned measures to help its staff improve their efficiency and effectiveness in handling water seepage cases while at the same time the new CMIS could generate necessary management information.

The FEHD has started taking actions to develop more effective and technically feasible means to maintain a database which is useful for monitoring actions taken on water seepage cases.

12. During the period that both the WCM Databases and the new CMIS are failed, how will FEHD ensure the proper follow-up of water seepage cases?

FEHD has taken the following measures to ensure that case officers will follow up on complaint cases (including water seepage cases) properly:

The FEHD Administrative Circular on Handling of Complaints requires supervisors to oversee the progress of cases undertaken by their subordinates, and conduct sample

checks to ensure that complaint cases are handled appropriately, and properly and timely recorded in the CMIS.

Every month, the Complaints Management Section sends emails regularly to remind staff to handle complaints within the set timeframes according to the FEHD guidelines and to accurately and timely record the case details and the latest progress in the CMIS. Supervisors are reminded to oversee the progress of cases undertaken by their subordinates; to monitor outstanding cases with the use of monthly analytical data and identify the reasons for such cases to remain pending, and to provide their subordinates with necessary guidance / assistance with a view to completing the cases as soon as possible.

Overdue cases have been put as standing agenda items for discussion at management meetings at Headquarters and district levels for monitoring of the case progress.

Monthly reports of overdue water seepage cases contain statistics on overdue cases and their details including the overdue time, case number, name and post of the Case Officer as well as the case progress (i.e. Stages I, II or III investigations), so that supervising officers can effectively monitor their staff and assist them to resolve the overdue cases.

In light of the implementation of the new CMIS rolled out by phases in December 2014, and that frontline staff expressed the problems they encountered in using the new system, FEHD decided that Joint Office would ensure the proper follow-up on water seepage cases using paper files. Besides, the CMIS would be used for the record of progress of water seepage cases and for appropriate monitoring. A weekly summary report would be sent to each Case Officer and their supervisors to remind them to handle the outstanding cases. The system is also equipped with an alerting function. For cases in which a reply cannot be given to the complainant within the established timeframe, an alert will be issued to remind the Case Officers and their supervisors about the contents and timeframes of the outstanding cases (e.g. the time frames to issue an interim reply or substantive reply) to enhance monitoring.

FEHD's Administrative Circular on Handling of Complaints reminds staff and supervising officers that all complaint case files should be maintained and kept properly. The originals of the documents concerned, in particular those which may be produced as evidence, should be duly kept in the working files.

13. Will FEHD review and reform the whole monitoring system of handling water seepage cases?

FEHD agreed with the view expressed in the Audit Report about the inadequate monitoring system of handling water seepage cases, and has started to review the departmental instruction issued in March 2008 on maintaining the WCM Databases, and whether the Databases have been maintained properly. Measures will also be taken to ensure that all related information in the system is updated in a timely manner. FEHD has also started to develop more effective and technically feasible means to capture data which will be useful for monitoring the progress of various actions taken on water seepage cases.

In the long term, FEHD will explore means to enhance the existing CMIS or set up a new database system, so that BD and FEHD Joint Office staff can keep the progress of various investigations in the CMIS or the new database, monitoring the investigation and follow-up progress more properly and comprehensively. To enhance the efficiency of handling water seepage reports, the management of BD and FEHD will also continue to regularly review whether there is further room for improvement on the system of the Joint Office. The review is expected to be completed in 2017.

14. It is stated in para. 2.52 and 2.53 that FEHD required Joint Office staff of all districts to maintain an Nuisance Notices Monitoring List (NNM List). However, 14 out of 19 districts failed to include one or more of the following items of information in the NNM List:

- date of serving a nuisance notice;**
- date of expiry of a nuisance notice; and**
- dates of conducting follow-up inspections of a nuisance notice.**

According to Table 5 in para. 2.53, 10 districts did not even provide the above records. What is/ are the reason(s)? Has FEHD conducted any investigation? Has any officer being punished?

15. Further to the above question, when did the FEHD's requirement on maintaining the NNM List come into effect? Has FEHD conducted regular inspection since the requirement came into effect? What is the last date of record which is still kept by FEHD? Why has FEHD not kept such records after that date? Has FEHD investigated whether maladministration was involved? Has any responsible officer

being punished?

16. Besides, it is mentioned in para. 2.54 that none of the districts recorded the results of compliance inspections and the date of referring a case to the FEHD Prosecution Section for taking enforcement actions. What difficulties did the responsible officers encounter and what is/are the reason(s) for failing to observe the requirement? Does the FEHD agree that the absence of related information has impeded the FEHD's monitoring of follow-up actions on nuisance noticed issued and Audit's examination of the completeness and timeliness of the FEHD in discharging its duties in this area? How will FEHD improve the situation?

14, 15 and 16

According to the guidelines issued by FEHD in 2006, Joint Office staff members of all District Offices are required to keep an NNM List. As the guidelines do not set out the specified format of such list and the information required, some staff of individual District Offices only put the Nuisance Notices monitoring information in separate paper files. As a result, some of the staff members failed to promptly provide a properly organised NNM List for the Audit Commission's review. Besides, the keeping of relevant information as required by the guidelines is mainly for record purpose and FEHD does not conduct random checks regularly in this respect.

The Audit Report pointed out and FEHD agreed that there was inadequacy in terms of keeping an NNM List by FEHD Joint Office. To improve work efficiency, FEHD is now looking into the possibility of upgrading the current CMIS, or establishing a new database system to record the information related to the issuance of Nuisance Notices.

Part 4 : Management Information System and Performance Reporting

Issues of the Management Information System

17. It is mentioned in paragraph 4.4 that, in July 2012, FEHD engaged a contractor at a cost of \$7.3 million to develop a CMIS. However, as paragraph 4.9 reveals, the new functions had not been fully implemented for the joint-office operation seven months after implementation of the new system in December 2015. As of July 2016, only basic information of new water seepage cases was input into the new CMIS by the 19 districts. What difficulties did FEHD staff encounter so that they failed to carry out this important administrative task? Could the poor efficiencies of the joint-office operation be attributed to the above reason? Does FEHD agree that the

new functions had not been fully implemented for the joint-office operation, causing inefficiency for the FEHD's management to monitor performance and progress of the cases? What measures will FEHD take to improve the situation? Further to the above question, at the time when the new functions of the new CMIS had not been fully implemented, how did FEHD guarantee water seepage cases were handled properly? When does FEHD expect the functions of the new CMIS be fully implemented?

FEHD is now generally adopting the new CMIS for all cases that require handling. The new system covers various kinds of complaints and water seepage is only one of them. As complaints are of different nature whereas the handling of them calls for different operational needs, it is necessary to determine the proper procedures and system functions according to the actual circumstances of various kinds of complaints, so as to fully facilitate staff to handle complaint cases effectively and efficiently.

It is more complex to handle water seepage cases than other complaints, which usually involved a large number of reference documents. For example, an individual case may involve several sub-divided flats and therefore a number of layout plans and the photographs showing potential seepage area(s) in each flat in different investigation stages have to be kept on file. Also, in handling the cases, it is often necessary to refer to different layout plans and photographs at the same time.

From December 2014 onwards, FEHD has rolled out the new CMIS by phases for implementation in the 19 FEHD districts. During the period, FEHD frontline staff expressed their views that adopting the new CMIS to replace paper files in handling water seepage cases had increased their workload and it was time-consuming to handle the information. Frontline staff had to spend considerable time to scan and upload documents, especially the large ones. As a result, efficiency and effectiveness of the handling of the cases had been adversely affected.

Case officers are required to make reference to previous reports and other documents. It is often cumbersome and inefficient to retrieve files from the computer system and to fully replace paper files with a new system in handling water seepage cases. When preparing for prosecution actions for a case, original documents may need to be located for the purpose. It will be faster and more effective to follow the usual practice of opening a paper file when starting to handle a case, which will be used later for the relevant internal procedures.

In mid-July 2015, after extensively consulting frontline staff and thoroughly reviewing the system functions, the work processes and nature of the cases and operational needs, FEHD decided that Joint Office would ensure the proper follow-up on water seepage cases using paper files. Besides, the CMIS would be used for the record of progress of water seepage cases and for appropriate monitoring. FEHD considered it appropriate to adopt a pragmatic approach to implement the above-mentioned measures to help its staff improve their efficiency and effectiveness in handling water seepage cases while at the same time the new CMIS could generate necessary management information. FEHD has started taking actions to develop more effective and technically feasible means to maintain a database which is useful for monitoring actions taken on water seepage cases. The study is expected to be completed in 2017.

In addition, as regards how FEHD guarantees that water seepage cases are properly followed up, please refer to the FEHD's response mentioned in Question 12 above.

18. In paragraph 4.12 of the Report, Audit has recommended that FEHD and BD should consider implementing a comprehensive database system for sharing all related data and scanned copies of documents among the systems, so as to improve the data and record keeping and updating of water seepage cases. In this connection, have the two departments drawn up any timetable to take forth the recommendation?

As stated in paragraph 4.17 of the Audit Report, the FEHD will make enhancements to the CMIS in collaboration with the BD in order to facilitate the implementation of the comprehensive database system. The Working Group set up by the FEHD and the BD to implement the project is now developing the details of the enhancements and drawing up the implementation timetable.

19. According to para. 4.22, FEHD and BD have not set performance targets on the overall timeframe for completing a water seepage case and the success rate of identifying the water seepage source under the joint-office operation. Does the FEHD agree that informants of water seepage cases and the public are mostly concerned about the time taken in and the success rate of identifying the seepage source by the joint-office operation and that the absence of such performance targets represent a failure in meeting public expectations? Will the Government set such performance targets?

The time taken to complete a case and the success rate of identifying the seepage source depend on case circumstances and other external factors that are beyond the control of the Joint Office. Investigations on simple and straightforward water-seepage cases usually complete within 90 working days (i.e. around 133 calendar days). At present, Joint Office has not set performance targets for water-seepage cases on the overall completion timeframe and the success rate of identifying the seepage sources. As mentioned in the Audit Commission's report, the absence of performance targets in these two areas is not in line with public expectations. The FEHD and the BD agree with the Audit's recommendation above that the performance targets of the Joint Office should be made known to the public to enhance transparency. Besides, the two departments are now examining in depth the feasibility of formulating performance indicators for handling water seepage cases which will be published regularly.