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19 October 2018

Panel on Development,
Legislative Council Complex,
Room 818, 1 Legislative Council Road,
Central
(Attn: Ms Doris LO)

Dear Ms LO,

Tree Management

Thank you for your e-mail of 24 September 2018 regarding the Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing's suggestions on the tree management regime and the Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan's enquiry on the progress of tree handling after Typhoon Mangkhut. Our response is set out in the following paragraphs.

Tree Management under an "Integrated" Approach

The Government is committed to the proper management of our tree assets. In view of the large quantity and the wide distribution of trees in Hong Kong, setting up a single government department to manage trees is not cost-effective. The Government adopts an "integrated approach" for tree management, under which departments are responsible for managing the trees in the facilities and lands within their purview as part and parcel of their daily work while the Tree Management Office (TMO) formulates policies and coordinates all tree management matters. TMO also offers advice and assists departments to deal with complex cases and cases involving multiple departments.

The “Guidelines for Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement” and “Guidelines on Arboriculture Occupational Safety and Health” issued by the Development Bureau (DEVB) set out the requirements on the qualifications, training and working experience of tree management practitioners. Tree management practitioners must have specified qualifications and training in arboriculture. In addition, to ensure professional and effective management of tree assets, TMO provides a wide range of training courses for tree management practitioners to enhance their professional knowledge. Over the past three years (i.e., 2015-2017), TMO has organised a total of 94 training courses for tree management practitioners.

After the tree failure incident at Shun Lee Estate, TMO immediately requested tree management departments to complete scheduled mitigation measures as soon as possible, examine the trees in areas of high pedestrian and traffic flows, and undertake appropriate precautionary measures to protect public safety.

Tree Management on Private Land

Private property owners are responsible for managing the trees within their private lots. The Government will remind property managers and private property owners to carry out risk assessments of the trees on their properties before the onset of wet season and implement mitigation measures in a timely manner, where necessary with the assistance of qualified arborists. The Government issued the “Handbook on Tree Management” (the Handbook) in April 2016 to provide guidelines and good practices on tree management to property owners, including proper tree care and tree pruning methods. The Handbook has been incorporated into the Code of Practice on Building Management and Maintenance under the Building Management Ordinance since September 2018.

Registration Regime for Tree Management Personnel

DEVB is working closely with the Qualifications Framework Secretariat of Education Bureau to assist the arboriculture and horticulture industry in

formulating the Specification of Competency Standards (SCS) under the Qualifications Framework. The work is progressing on course. The SCS, expected to be completed by the end of 2019, will provide the basis for the establishment of a registration or accreditation system for arborists, with a view to standardising and enhancing the overall professional knowledge and standard of the industry. DEVB is considering practicable options.

Dangerous Trees

Like other living organisms, trees undergo the life cycle of growth, ageing, sickness and death. The health and stability of trees are affected by many internal physiological and external environmental factors. As different factors interact with each other, the outcome is unpredictable. For instance, under inclement weather, healthy and stable trees may succumb to strong winds. When risk assessments suggest that a tree may endanger public safety, appropriate mitigation measures will be implemented to mitigate the risks. For dangerous trees with irremediable problems, tree management departments will remove them as soon as possible to protect public safety. Information on trees that require regular monitoring, such as Old and Valuable Trees, stonewall trees, trees infected with Brown Root Rot Disease, problematic trees found during tree risk assessment etc., is uploaded to the Tree Register, which contains electronic maps and details of the trees, including location, species, health and structural conditions, risk mitigation measures taken, and tree images, etc. The website of the Tree Register is —

https://www.greening.gov.hk/en/community_outreach/tree_register.html

Progress of Tree Handling after Typhoon Mangkhut

Typhoon Mangkhut is a super tropical cyclone. Typhoon Signal No. 10 remained in force for ten hours, five hours longer than Super Typhoon Hato last year. According to the Beaufort Wind Force Scale, wind speed of Level 10 (this strength of wind lasted at least 10 hours during Typhoon Mangkhut) can cause uprooting of trees and damage of structures. Typhoon Mangkhut has caused extensive tree damage, with a total of 54 694 reports of fallen trees received as at

2 October 2018.

After the typhoon, various government departments worked in close collaboration to clean up the fallen trees and remove broken tree trunks and branches. Some companies and organisations also formed volunteer teams to provide assistance. In addition to more than 10 000 workers undertaking clean-up operations every day, volunteers from different sectors of the community, including the disciplined services, were also involved in clearing fallen trees and debris.

Tree management departments have re-inspected the trees in areas of high pedestrian and traffic flow, and implemented appropriate mitigation measures to protect public safety, including pulling back tilted trees into upright position, guying and propping them, removing unstable ones, cordoning off trees pending remedial work, etc. So far, tree management departments have completed the inspection of all the trees in areas with high pedestrian and traffic flow, as well as supported, cordoned off and removed damaged trees to minimise risks. We will continue to deal with problematic trees received by the Government Hotline as soon as possible.

We are drawing up a replanting programme, following the guiding principle of “Right Tree Right Place” promulgated by the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section of DEVB. Before replanting, departments will holistically consider the planting objectives, the environment of the planting sites and the characteristics and needs of different tree species in order to select suitable tree species that can grow healthily. Resilience to wind and the relationship between tree size and road width will be taken into account. DEVB has convened an inter-departmental meeting to coordinate the replanting programme.

We will release the “Street Tree Selection Guide” by the end of this year to provide guidelines on the selection of suitable tree species for different street types in Hong Kong. The 80 species recommended in the Guide are resilient to wind, heat, drought, flood, pests and diseases, etc. and are suitable for urban street environments. The Guide will be used by government departments. We welcome the industry and the public to make reference to it and offer feedback.

Depending on tree species and conditions, before the onset of wet season of each year or every half year, tree management departments will conduct tree

risk assessments in high pedestrian and traffic flow areas in accordance with the “Guidelines for Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement” issued by DEVB. Appropriate mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce the risk of tree failures. We will continue to manage our precious tree assets in a holistic manner.

Should you require further information, please contact me at 3509 8327 or email to florenceko@devb.gov.hk.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Florence KO', written in a cursive style.

(Florence KO)
for Secretary for Development