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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 16 April 2019**

Government's initiative to improve public toilet facilities and services

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Government's plan to improve public toilet facilities and the related cleansing services, and summarizes major views and concerns of members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

2. According to information available on the website of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department ("FEHD"), there are altogether 799 public toilets under FEHD's management: 90 on Hong Kong Island, 62 in Kowloon, and 647 in the New Territories and on outlying islands. In addition, there are 53 aqua privies in the New Territories and on outlying islands. Public toilets at parks, beaches and recreational venues are managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. To improve cost-effectiveness, cleansing services for all public toilets are contracted out.

3. All FEHD's public toilets are open 24 hours a day and cleansed at least twice a day. According to the Administration, the latest standard of provision of public toilets carries the following features:

- (a) the external design shall be aesthetical and distinctive;
- (b) the toilet areas shall be spacious;

- (c) materials such as large tiles and urinal bowl shall be used for ease of maintenance;
- (d) the toilet areas shall be provided with sufficient lighting, both natural and artificial, with the use of glass block partitions;
- (e) ventilation in the toilet areas shall be enhanced with high headroom, cross-ventilation windows and ventilation system to provide a well-ventilated environment;
- (f) service corridors shall be provided at the back of water closet cubicles to accommodate pipes, drains, concealed cisterns and automatic flushing cisterns of urinals for ease of maintenance;
- (g) adequate and modern facilities, such as electric hand dryers and stainless steel handrails, shall be provided;
- (h) accessible toilets shall be provided in the general toilet areas;
- (i) more facilities, such as small litter bins for disposal of sanitary napkins and hooks, shall be provided; and
- (j) baby napkin changing area shall be provided in the toilet areas.

4. In order to upgrade old public toilets to the latest standard of provision, FEHD has launched an annual refurbishment programme for public toilets under its management. In 2018, 14 public toilets were upgraded.

Members' concerns

5. At the Panel meeting on 11 December 2018, when the Administration briefed members on its plan to improve the facilities of and related cleansing services for 23 public toilets at major tourist spots as announced in the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Agenda, members expressed concerns over the hygiene conditions, cleanliness and facilities of all public toilets managed by FEHD. Members' major views and concerns are summarized below.

Hardware improvements for public toilets

6. Many members were concerned that the facilities of some public toilets were sub-standard and dilapidated. In their view, it was necessary for FEHD to make immediate noticeable improvements to the facilities and hygiene conditions of public toilets, particularly those with relatively high usage rates.

An enquiry was raised as to whether FEHD had any plan to improve the facilities and hygiene conditions of all the 700-odd public toilets across the territory and if yes, the enhancement strategies for public toilets other than those at major tourist spots and the timetable for taking forward the improvement plan.

7. According to the Administration, FEHD would, as part of its annual programme, shortlist a specific number of public toilets every year for conducting refurbishment works, having regard to the actual circumstances of individual toilets. The improvement plan for public toilets at major tourist spots was only the beginning. FEHD would extend the plan to other public toilets with reference to the experience accumulated.

8. Members urged FEHD to arrange speedy repairs of public toilet facilities when damages or malfunctions of facilities were reported. Some members held the view that FEHD and the Architectural Services Department ("ArchSD") should enhance coordination in taking forward renovation and repair works for public toilets.

9. The Administration advised that FEHD and ArchSD had set up a working group to review from time to time the design and existing sanitary fittings and equipment in public toilets, carry out refurbishment works for dilapidated public toilets and install new facilities of the latest standard. In parallel, FEHD staff were deployed for daily inspection of the hygiene conditions, cleanliness and facilities of public toilets across the territory. Upon noticing minor faults or consumable items (such as light bulbs or florescent tubes) in need for replacement, the cleansing service contractors would carry out minor repairs or replacement within 24 hours. As for relatively more serious faults, FEHD staff would inform ArchSD for follow-up actions as appropriate.

10. The Administration further advised that FEHD would gradually provide or retrofit new and refurbished public toilets with the following facilities:

- (a) automatic sensor water tap and soap dispenser for each wash hand basin;
- (b) electric hand dryers (with a drain tank) at suitable places in the common areas;
- (c) waterproof power sockets at suitable places in the common areas;
- (d) lockable stainless steel toilet paper holders to provide jumbo roll tissue in toilet compartments;

- (e) blower fans (with timer control) to keep floor dry;
- (f) use of Light Emitting Diode (commonly known as "LED") lighting to replace conventional ones; and
- (g) manhole covers of public toilets would be replaced at inconspicuous locations and away from the toilet entrances as far as practicable.

11. There was also a suggestion that FEHD should explore the application of new technologies in public toilets with reference to the practices of the Mainland and overseas countries, with a view to enhancing the hygiene conditions of public toilets in Hong Kong. The Administration advised that FEHD, in consultation with ArchSD and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, was exploring the application of the following new technologies:

- (a) application of advance ozone technology on a trial basis for Sai Yee Street Garden Public Toilet in Mong Kok in the first quarter of 2019 – ozonated water would be injected into the flushing system to inhibit bacteria growth, and degraded odour molecule so as to abate odour and improve air quality;
- (b) application of Nano Confined Catalytic Oxidation technology on a trial basis for Peak Tower Public Toilet and Southorn Centre Public Toilet in Wan Chai in the second quarter of 2019. The technology decomposed odour molecules and pollutants into harmless water molecules and carbon dioxide so as to abate odour and improve air quality; and
- (c) use of sensor to detect malfunction of certain equipment at remote public toilets.

Software improvements for public toilets

12. Some members considered that FEHD's practice of awarding outsourced contracts to the lowest bidder had resulted in inferior cleansing services. They enquired whether FEHD would review its existing cleansing contract tendering system, with a view to improving the cleansing services for public toilets provided by outsourced contractors. In members' views, service contractors should be required to increase the manpower and resources for performing the cleansing work, and FEHD should specify clearly in outsourced cleansing services tender documents/contracts the service requirements and performance standards as well as the equipment and training to be provided for cleansing workers by contractors.

13. The Administration advised that FEHD had in place a management mechanism for its outsourced contracts. Service requirements and performance standards were stipulated in the contracts. FEHD's staff would check whether the contractors had complied with the cleansing services contracts through site inspections, surprise checks and examination of job records. In the event of any irregularities, defaults or non-compliance with contract provisions in the delivery of public toilet cleansing services, FEHD would take follow-up actions, including the issue of verbal and written warnings, default notices, deduction of monthly payment and even termination of contracts.

14. The Administration further advised that FEHD had since September 2018 stepped up inspection and monitoring of contractor's performance in respect of 83 public toilets with relatively high usage rates to ensure that the cleansing services provided were up to standard and the routine deep cleansing was performed on a regular basis. This management measure had brought about noticeable improvement to the hygiene conditions of the public toilets concerned. On top of routine cleansing services, FEHD would set up dedicated deep cleansing teams starting from the first quarter of 2019 to perform regular deep cleansing services for public toilets with relatively high usage rates. Such dedicated services would be extended to all public toilets upon renewal of cleansing services contracts in the future.

15. In response to members' suggestion of engaging third-party players, e.g. consultants and non-profit-making organizations, in monitoring cleansing services and handling of complaints, the Administration advised that there were various channels (such as Members' offices, the Office of the Ombudsman, the government hotline 1823, etc.) which the public might raise suggestions on or complaints about the services of FEHD. FEHD would follow up the cases and its Quality Assurance Section would conduct surprise inspections of cleansing services and facilities, including follow-up investigations in response to complaints. District management staff had also stepped up surprise inspections of public toilets and monitoring of contractors' performances in order to enhance hygiene conditions of public toilets. In November 2018, FEHD created three Senior Health Inspector posts which were mainly responsible for surprise inspections of cleansing services and facilities. As the measures in place could effectively improve the monitoring of public toilet services, the Administration currently had no plan to introduce external parties for monitoring purpose.

Recent developments

16. The Financial Secretary has announced in the 2019-2020 Budget the allocation of more resources to FEHD for refurbishing its public toilets by phases, improving ventilation and other facilities, as well as enhancing their cleanliness and hygiene. It is estimated that a total expenditure of over \$600 million may be incurred, involving about 240 public toilets in the coming five years. At the suggestion of members, the Administration will brief members on this new initiative at the Panel meeting on 16 April 2019.

Relevant papers

17. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 April 2019

**Relevant papers on Government's initiative
to improve public toilet facilities and services**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	11.12.2018 (Item VI)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> Administration's response to motion passed at the meeting in relation to improving public toilet facilities and services (LC Paper No. <u>CB(2)514/18-19(01)</u>)

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