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The Clerk to Panel on Public Service,
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex,
1 Legislative Council Road,
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn. Ms Carol WONG)

25 February 2020

Dear Ms WONG,

**Legislative Council Panel on Public Service
Submission from a union representative**

Thank you for your letter of 24 January 2019 relaying the email from a staff union representative regarding the manpower arrangement in relation to the tree management work of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). We have looked into the case and our substantive reply is as follows.

The LCSD is responsible for the maintenance of around 590 000 trees, including about 340 000 trees growing in the LCSD's venues, some 140 000 roadside landscape trees growing on pavements or landscaped amenity areas along non-expressway public roads, and around 110 000 trees on unleased and unallocated government lands (UUGL trees) falling within 10m from kerb of public roads, except expressways. The trees within LCSD's venues are managed by the 18 District Leisure Services Offices through horticultural services contracts. The roadside landscape trees are maintained by six Regional Tree Teams (RTTs), namely Hong Kong East Tree Team (HKETT), Hong Kong West Tree Team (HKWTT), Kowloon Tree Team (KTT), New Territories East Tree Team (NTETT), New Territories West Tree Team (NTWTT) and New Territories North Tree Team (NTNTT). There are a total of 34 operational tree gangs (TGs), each comprising 1 Amenities Assistant II, 1 Senior Artisan, 2 Artisans and 1 Workman I, under the six RTTs. Seven (7) out of the 34 TGs are designated for looking after the 329 Old and Valuable Trees of the LCSD, while the number of staff and in-house operational Tree Gangs (TGs)

in each RTT depends on the number of trees managed by the RTT and the complexity of the maintenance work involved.

In accordance with the Director of Audit's Report No. 63 released in October 2014, a number of recommendations were put forward on the government's efforts in enhancing tree safety. In response to the recommendations, LCSD was tasked by the Development Bureau to gradually take over from the Lands Department the responsibilities of maintaining the UUGL trees since January 2016. To cope with the new tree management arrangement, a total of 45 permanent posts were created in 2016/17 and 2018/19 financial years for the six LCSD's RTTs. The number of additional posts created were mainly based on the number of UUGL trees in the respective regions. Amongst the 45 permanent posts, 38 posts, namely 1 Leisure Services Manager, 8 Assistant Leisure Services Manager I, 6 Senior Amenities Assistants (SAA) and 23 Amenities Assistant I (AAI), were created to enhance management of the roadside landscape trees and UUGL trees and 7 General Grade posts are created to provide clerical support and record management for 6 RTTs. In addition, LCSD engaged outsourced horticultural/arboricultural services contractors in 2018 to provide services on survey, inspection, risk assessment, maintenance and remedial works for the UUGL trees. The newly created 6 SAA and 23 AAI are mainly responsible for arranging and monitoring tree inspection services provided by the contractors; monitoring the performance and quality of tree risk mitigation works conducted by the contractors; auditing the Tree Risk Assessments reports done by the contractors and assisting ALSMI to handle complaints in relation to the UUGL trees.

For the 140 000 roadside landscape trees, the 27 TGs from the 6 RTTs continue taking up the duties in inspection, maintenance and remedial works. And in urban regions, the TGs continue to carry out the risk assessment for roadside landscape trees. Whereas in the New Territories, most of these tree risk assessments are conducted by outsourced contractors. The Amenities Assistants (AAs) from RTTs in New Territories regions are mainly responsible for vetting the tree risk assessment reports submitted by the contractors and updating the records in the LCSD's Tree Data Bank System if necessary.

Nevertheless, to enhance the level of service and to implement the tree management more efficiently, the LCSD conducted a comprehensive review on the manpower provision for the 6 RTTs again in mid-2019. The 27 TGs under the 6 RTTs shared out the responsibility in managing the 140 000 roadside landscape trees. However, each TG of the NTETT and NTNTT was responsible for maintenance of a relatively large number of trees, i.e. 7 500 and 9 400 respectively. The situation was undesirable. In view of such, it was recommended that the manpower of NTETT and

NTNTT be enhanced by adding a total of 14 TGs from the market, i.e. 6 for NTETT and 8 for NTNTT, for operational tree work starting 2020-21 financial year. In addition, a total of 5 AAI, i.e. 2 for NTETT and 3 for NTNTT, were also proposed to supervise the TGs.

To sum up, the LCSD has conducted three reviews on the provision of manpower for the 6 RTTs since 2016 according to the operational needs. A total of 45 permanent posts were created and additional outsourced horticultural/ arboricultural services contractors were hired. As a result, the number of AAs in the 6 RTTs had been increased from 62 originally to 91 at present. With our plan to bid for resources in 2020-21 financial year for employing additional AAs and manpower from outsourced contractors, it is considered that the reinforced RTTs should be able to handle the daily tree maintenance and related works.

As regards staff posting arrangement, LCSD's AAs are a team of multi-skilled staff who are dedicated to manage various types of recreational facilities, including sports centres, parks, sports grounds, beaches/swimming pools, etc. From time to time, the LCSD will arrange posting and transfer of staff including AAs to different positions so as to broaden their experience and knowledge in different fields. The existing posting and transfer arrangement is effective. It trains up more staff with various kinds of qualifications and experience and thus enhance the quality of services provided by the LCSD. In fact, operation of most of the LCSD's recreational venues involves tree management, it is not duty only limited to staff working under RTTs. Therefore, there is no mismatch of human resources.

Please feel free to contact me or Mr BAR Ting-ming, Senior Leisure Manager (Horticulture) at 2601 8886 should further information be required.

Yours sincerely,



(David CHAIONG)

for Director of Leisure & Cultural Services

c.c. Secretary for the Civil Service (Attn.: Ms Bertille LI)