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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Meeting on 26 March 2024

Background brief on Government's rodent control work

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the rodent control work undertaken by the Government, and summarizes major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (“the Panel”) in the Seventh Legislative Council (“LegCo”) on the subject.

Background

2. According to the Administration, its rodent control strategy is to eliminate the fundamental survival conditions of rodents, namely food, harbourage and passages (such work mainly includes elimination of food sources and hiding places of rodents, as well as blockage of their dispersal routes). The following performance indicators have been respectively set in the Policy Address of 2022 and 2023 in respect of rodent control:

	Performance indicators	Progress
2022 Policy Address	Reduce the number of priority rodent blackspots at least by half by end-2023.	Among 108 priority rodent black spots throughout the territory, around 60% of them (a total of 70) has been eliminated in 2023 .
2023 Policy Address	Remove 60% of the remaining and newly identified priority rodent blackspots by end-2024	Ongoing

3. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”) has implemented a series of targeted measure to enhance the effectiveness of anti-

rodent work, including (a) increasing the number of overnight rodent control roving teams to 31; (b) continuing the application of various new anti-rodent technologies and tools; and (c) extending the trial scheme of allowing licensed food premises to place large-size waste containers in their adjacent rear lanes for temporary storage of waste until collection by the cleaning workers hired by the food premises (“the Trial Scheme”).

Members’ views and concerns

4. Members’ major views and concerns are summarized below.

Effectiveness of the Government’s rodent control work

5. Members called on the Administration to **abandon** the **ineffective anti-rodent methods** adopted in the past, and to actively implement new measures and **expedite** the **introduction of new technologies** to effectively solve the problem of rodent infestation. The Administration advised that in order to enhance the efficacy of trapping rodents, it would continue to (a) apply new technologies, tools and baits (including setting up T-shaped bait boxes and the trial use of Ekomile); (b) dispatch overnight rodent control roving teams to identify locations for placing rodent cage traps at night and retrieval of the traps in the morning, where the high pedestrian flows made it impractical to place the traps in daytime; and (c) place glue traps for rats at rodent black spots. In addition, relevant bureaux/departments would launch a territory-wide anti-rodent campaign in collaboration with all sectors of the community.

6. Members expressed concern about the **ongoing rodent issues** found in **some food premises and public markets** and were pleased to note that the Administration would extend the Trial Scheme to more rear lanes connected to food premises. They enquired about the progress and outcome of the three-month rodent infestation assessment and anti-rodent work implemented in three selected markets ¹ by three pest control services contractors engaged by the Administration. There was a suggestion that the Administration should consider amending the relevant legislation and/or regulations to allow the keeping of cats in food premises and public markets to help eliminate rodent infestation.

7. The Administration advised that the number of live rodents caught and dead rodents collected by the three pest control services contractors engaged by FEHD at the three selected markets was one to three times higher than the relevant figures

¹ The three selected markets are namely Shek Tong Tsui Market in the Central and Western District, Shui Wo Street Market in Kwun Tong and Heung Che Street Market in Tsuen Wan.

recorded in the routine anti-rodent work conducted by FEHD. Upon completion of the scheme in May 2023, FEHD would comprehensively review the results and costs of the work, and examine in a timely manner the feasibility of extending the scheme to other markets. In the meantime, FEHD would continue to carry out deep cleansing operations in public markets, and extend the intensive anti-rodent operations to all markets and fixed-pitch hawker areas.

Monitoring the performance of pest control services contractors

8. Members expressed concern that, as revealed in the Office of the Ombudsman (“the Ombudsman”)’s [direct investigation report](#) published on 26 May 2022, frontline and supervisory staff of a number of pest control services contractors did not have adequate training on the correct use of tools and equipment for rodent disinfection. Members considered that the Administration should (a) **holistically review and refine**, as and where appropriate, the **criteria for selecting tenderers for pest control services**, and (b) **strengthen the mechanism for monitoring the performance of services contractors**. There was also a view that the Administration should review the tendering and procurement systems that follows the guiding principle of “lowest bid wins”, lest hindering relevant departments’ introduction of new rodent control technologies and tools.

9. The Administration advised that as a general tender requirement, the supervisors and workmen of pest control services contractors engaged by FEHD must have the relevant qualification and experience in pest control. In respect of the Ombudsman’s findings and recommendations, the Administration advised that FEHD had requested the pest control services contractors to ensure that their new recruits were acquainted with the proper procedures in the application of poison baits by making reference to the training materials produced and provided by FEHD. FEHD would issue notices of default to pest control services contractors for failing to comply with the relevant contract requirements, which would affect the technical scores of the contractors in future tender exercises. Furthermore, FEHD was developing a mobile application to facilitate staff of the pest control services contractors to report operational data on-site.² The information collected would be used to develop a database for planning and evaluating the effectiveness of anti-rodent measures. The Administration assured members that it had been adopting the principles of “achieving best value for money” and “maintaining open and fair competition” for government procurement.

² The data to be reported covered the location and number of traps or baiting points laid, live rodents trapped, dead rodents collected, etc.

Rodent infestation in privately owned premises

10. Members expressed grave concern that **some private residential units were seriously infested with rodents**, causing serious nuisance and hygiene problems to the neighbourhood. In members' view, the Administration should proactively tackle the problem of rodent infestation in privately owned premises. Members also considered that FEHD should **update its rodent control guidelines** in a timely manner to **strengthen the promotion of effective rodent trapping technologies and tools**.

11. The Administration advised that that in accordance with section 47 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) ("PHMSO"), it was the responsibility of owners or occupiers of private premises to perform disinfection of vermin (including rodents) found in their premises. If needed, FEHD might issue a notice requiring the owner or occupier of the premises to cleanse the premises and to destroy and remove any vermin within a specified time frame pursuant to section 47(1) of PHMSO. Subject to the circumstances of individual cases, prosecutions would be taken out against non-compliance of such statutory notices. FEHD might also invoke section 126 of PHMSO to make application to the Magistrate's Court for entry into private premises that were infested with vermin within a specified time to conduct investigation; and might pursuant to section 47(4) of PHMSO take reasonable steps to destroy or remove the vermin in the premises for protection of public health.

12. The Administration further advised that to help address rodent infestation at private premises, FEHD released [the Code of Practice for Rodent Management](#) and a series of [Checklists for Anti-rodent Work](#) in late 2022 for reference by relevant departments, property management companies, owners' incorporations, etc. FEHD would also proactively conduct more inspections to the common parts of private residential estates (e.g. refuse storage rooms, amenity gardens, meter rooms, etc.) and shopping malls on a risk-based approach to locate signs of rodent infestation.

Review of the Rodent Infestation Rate

13. Members considered that the Administration should review the method for calculating the Rodent Infestation Rate ("RIR") so that the Rodent Infestation Survey ("RIS") could reflect more accurately the situation of rodent infestations in different districts. The Administration advised that it was piloting new methodology of rodent surveillance and adopting thermal imaging cameras with the artificial intelligence function for tracking rodent activities at individual survey locations on a trial basis, with a view to formulating a more representative new RIR to progressively replace the existing RIR so as to more accurately reflect the situation of rodent infestation.

Latest development

14. According to the Administration, FEHD has been **conducting a new Rodent Activity Survey** across the territory in lieu of the original RIS starting **from January 2024**. FEHD will enumerate a **Rodent Absence Rate** for each district to facilitate FEHD to take targeted anti-rodent actions.

Relevant papers

15. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in [Appendix](#).

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
15 March 2024

Relevant papers on Government's rodent control work

Committee	Date of meeting	Papers
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	14 June 2022	Agenda Item IV: Mosquito and rodent control work Minutes Follow-up paper
	9 May 2023	Agenda Item III: Progress of the Government programme on tackling hygiene black spots and rodent control Minutes Follow-up paper

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