

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION**

S-FHB(FE)04

Head: 49 Food and Environmental
Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title):

Question Serial No.

S148

Programme:

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

As pointed out by The Ombudsman, Mr Alan Lai, in July 2010, the Joint Offices of the Buildings Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department were set up to offer "one-stop services" to handle water seepage complaints. However, due to frequent turnover and shortage of contract staff, their investigation of seepage complaints chronically suffered delays and disruption. The Joint Offices came under fire from the public as a result. He attributed the above problem to the Government's insistence on employing staff on short-term contracts, causing the Government to get caught in its own trap.

In this regard, will the Department inform this Committee:

- (a) of the follow-up measures taken in response to the comments of The Ombudsman, Mr Alan Lai;
- (b) whether the Department's follow-up measures are effective in improving the problem of frequent turnover and shortage of staff (please illustrate with figures);
- (c) of the financial implications of the follow-up measures; and
- (d) of the reasons for not recruiting the staff on civil service terms, as well as the financial implications if such a change is to be made?

Asked by: Hon. WONG Yuk-man

Reply:

The information sought is provided as follows -

- (a)&(b) The Joint Office (JO) will continue to introduce measures to address comments of The Ombudsman. For the Buildings Department (BD), most staff working in JO are Non-civil Service Contract (NCSC) staff. When shortage of manpower arises, BD will re-deploy staff from other sections to maintain the level of service in JO. As for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), 81 Health Inspectors (HIs) will be deployed to replace NCSC staff in the JO by phases commencing from April 2011 to maintain a more stable workforce in the JO, and to cope with the increasing number of water seepage complaint cases.

Besides, the handling of water seepage complaints has been included in the comprehensive review of the overall strategy being conducted by the Administration to enhance building safety in Hong Kong. The review will examine Government's role on the issue, the feasibility of using mediation and how best to utilise our resources to tackle the water seepage problem. The views of stakeholders will be taken into consideration.

(c) & (d) Deployment of civil service staff to the JO in 2011-12 will involve the recruitment of 81 HIs. The resources will be met within FEHD's allocation.

Signature _____

Name in block letters CLEMENT LEUNG

Post Title Director of
Food and Environmental Hygiene

Date 31.3.2011