

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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(Question Serial No. 2598)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services
Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Please advise on the following:

1. the total number of liquor licence applications received in 2015 and 2016, as well as the number of liquor licence applications estimated for 2017;
2. the staff establishment of the Liquor Licensing Board from 2015 to 2017; and
3. the progress in following up the implementation of measures to enhance the liquor licensing regime.

Asked by: Hon HUI Chi-fung (Member Question No. 5)

Reply:

- (1) In 2015 and 2016, the total numbers of liquor licence applications received are 8 936 and 6 520 respectively. In 2017, the estimated number of applications expected to be received is 6 800.
- (2) A total of 40 staff in the three licensing offices in the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department are responsible to handle liquor and club liquor licence applications as part of their licensing-related duties. In addition, 9 staff are deployed for providing secretariat support to the Liquor Licensing Board (LLB). The aforesaid staff establishment has been maintained since 2015.
- (3) The Government conducted a public consultation in 2011 and implemented a number of administrative measures subsequently to improve the liquor licensing regime. In May 2013, the LLB revamped its procedures for dealing with applications for the renewal or transfer of liquor licence, thereby allowing more sensitive handling of views from the neighbourhood. The LLB published in December 2013 a set of guidelines on the factors that should be taken into account when assessing liquor licence applications, the scrutiny on applications from upstairs bars, as well as the more stringent conditions that the LLB may impose including those relating to

capacity limit and measures to abate noise nuisance for premises etc. Separately, the LLB has since June 2014 added express provisions in the licensing conditions stipulating that restaurant licensees must comply with fire safety requirements at all times (such that minor breaches, if repeatedly not attended to promptly, would render them liable to suspension/cancellation of licence). In addition, documentary evidence of continuous compliance with fire safety requirements (namely that the fire safety related certificates issued by registered specialist contractors remain valid at the material time) must be adduced when the Department processes applications for licence renewal. An overwhelming majority of liquor-licensed premises have restaurant licences.

Apart from the administrative measures that have been implemented, the Dutiable Commodities (Liquor) (Amendment) Regulation 2015 came into operation on 3 August 2015. It extends the maximum validity period of a liquor licence from 1 year to 2 years, and facilitates electronic submission of applications for the issue or renewal of liquor licence.

In addition, the LLB has allowed the trade an additional option, other than a digital certificate, to use a password assigned or approved by the Board to submit renewal and amendment applications since July 2016 and new and transfer applications since October 2016.

To minimise disruption to the liquor selling business due to sudden departure of the licensee, the LLB would implement in late March 2017 a reserve licensee mechanism under which identification and nomination of a suitable person as a reserve licensee to take over the role of the licensee at an early stage is allowed.

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