

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)027

(Question Serial No. 0749)

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 (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

In this Programme, it is stated that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will implement the Enhanced Public Toilet Refurbishment Programme, improve the planning, provision and management of public toilets, and try out dedicated contracts to enhance public toilet cleansing. Please advise on the following:

1. How many public toilets are currently managed by the Department? How many of them have their cleansing services provided by outsourced contractors, and how many are cleaned and directly managed by the Department? How many public toilet cleansing workers were employed by the Department in the past 2 years? How many of them were outsourced workers and how many were in-house staff?
2. Further to the above question, what were the salaries, employment terms and conditions (e.g. meal breaks) as well as working hours of the cleansing workers directly employed by the Department and those engaged by outsourced contractors?
3. Did the Department provide its public toilet cleansing workers with allowances and anti-epidemic supplies items as well as additional manpower to relieve their workload under the epidemic in the past 2 years? If yes, what are the details and the expenditure involved?
4. For the recommendations on improving the public toilet cleansing service and strengthening the monitoring regime of the Department made in the direct investigation report of the Office of The Ombudsman released earlier, what are the Department's follow-up actions? What is the work in the coming year and the estimated expenditure to be involved in this regard?
5. Has the Department stepped up cleansing of public toilets and protection for public toilet cleansing workers under the new wave of epidemic to avoid spreading virus from public toilets? If yes, what are the details and the expenditure involved?

Asked by: Hon TANG Ka-piu (LegCo internal reference no.: 5)

Reply:

1. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is responsible for the management of 806 public toilets, of which 194 public toilets are directly managed by FEHD to provide cleansing services, while cleansing services for the remaining 612 public toilets are provided by outsourced service contractors.

All toilet attendants of the public toilets under the management of FEHD are employed by outsourced service contractors. The numbers of toilet attendants under outsourced service contracts in the past 2 years are as follows:

Year	2020-21 (as at 31 March 2021)	2021-22 (as at 31 December 2021)
Number of toilet attendants under outsourced service contracts ^{Note}	966	947

Note: The number of toilet attendants is the number of functional posts specified in the contracts.

2. The average monthly wage payable to a toilet attendant as committed by service contractors in 2021-22 (as at 31 December 2021) was \$14,814. The monthly wage of a toilet attendant was calculated on the basis of 9 working hours per day and 27 working days plus 4 paid rest days per month. Other employment terms and conditions (e.g. meal breaks and working hours) were agreed between individual service contractors and their employees.
3. FEHD has provided toilet attendants with additional support under the epidemic, including the following items:
 - (i) a monthly allowance of \$1,000 was provided through service contractors to their eligible frontline cleansing workers, including toilet attendants, for 7 months from March to September 2020 with the funds allocated by the Government from the first round of the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF). A monthly allowance of \$2,000 was provided to frontline cleansing workers (including toilet attendants) under government contracts for 5 months from February 2022 with the funds allocated by the Government from the sixth round of the AEF under the new wave of epidemic;
 - (ii) face masks have been provided for frontline staff (including toilet attendants) of outsourced cleansing contractors to safeguard their health under the special arrangements made by the Government since February 2020. So far, about 28 million masks were provided for frontline staff of the contractors in 2020-21 and 2021-22 (as at February 2022); and
 - (iii) dedicated deep cleansing teams were introduced in outsourced cleansing contracts to further improve the cleanliness of public toilets and share the workload of toilet attendants for enhancement of public toilet cleansing service in the past 2 years.

Overall, FEHD deployed in-house resources and increased the manpower of contractors involved based on operational needs for anti-epidemic efforts in the past 2 financial years. The additional manpower and expenditure incurred were absorbed by the overall financial provision for the Department and the AEF.

4. The Office of The Ombudsman released a direct investigation report on the “Management and Repair of Public Toilets by Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and Architectural Services Department” in May 2021. FEHD has implemented most of the recommendations therein, and is actively following up the recommendations on making improvements to its Contract Management System for more effective collection of records on follow-up actions taken by District Environmental Hygiene Offices against defaults by contractors, and drawing up specific performance indicators for cleansing services provided to public toilets and directly managed by FEHD for compliance by its staff. Following up the recommendations of The Ombudsman made in the report is part of the normal duties of FEHD. Further breakdown on the relevant expenditure of the work is not available.
5. FEHD attaches great importance to the safety and occupational health of its staff (including in-house staff and staff employed by outsourced contractors). FEHD and outsourced cleansing contractors assess the risks of various working environment settings to take appropriate protective measures, which include providing staff with adequate and suitable protective gears and safety training. It is stipulated in FEHD’s service contracts that contractors must comply with all legislation in relation to performance of contracts, including the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509) and its subsidiary regulations. Contractors are required to abide by the contract provisions to provide their cleansing workers with adequate, effective and suitable personal protective equipment (e.g. surgical face masks, rubber gloves and other protective clothing) and safety training, and make appropriate work arrangements etc. to ensure their occupational safety and health. FEHD does not keep a separate breakdown of the expenditure in this respect.

To combat the epidemic, FEHD will continue to step up the cleansing of public toilets. The toilet attendants on duty cleanse and disinfect the floor, water closets, urinals, wash hand basins, toilet seats, door handles, handrails, etc. every 2 hours with 1:99 diluted household bleach. For other public toilets, cleansing workers also carry out cleansing and disinfection with 1:99 diluted household bleach at least twice a day when performing routine cleansing service. To reduce the risk of virus transmission through contact, anti-microbial coating is applied to frequently touched surfaces such as door knobs and handrails of toilet compartments as well as toilet seats and hand-dryers in about 270 public toilets with high utilisation rates. In addition, sensor-activated sanitisers for cleaning hands and toilet seats are provided in all public toilets.

The Financial Secretary announced in the 2022-23 Budget Speech that a total additional funding of \$500 million would be allocated within 2 years for FEHD to enhance environmental hygiene services. In this light, FEHD plans to improve the hygiene of public toilets by employing more toilet attendants in 2022-23 to further step up cleansing service at public toilets, in particular those with high patronage. The estimated increase in staffing expenditure in 2022-23 is \$43 million.

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