

A. Introduction

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD")'s development and management of parks and gardens.

2. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses to its enquiries.

B. Planning and provision of park and garden facilities

3. The Committee enquired whether the LCSD had laid down standards for the provision of public open space and recreation facilities, such as the provision in the 18 districts in the territory, and the walking distance between such public open space and recreation facilities and the majority of residents it intended to be served.

4. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied in her letter of 24 May 2013 (in *Appendix 13*) that:

- in planning the provision of public open space and recreation facilities, the LCSD would first make reference to the standards stipulated in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines ("HKPSG"). According to the HKPSG, a minimum of 20 hectares ("ha") of open space should be provided for every 100 000 persons, apportioned as 10 ha of local open space ("LOS") and 10 ha of district open space ("DOS") for every 100 000 persons. LOS mainly provided passive recreation facilities for the local community, which should be located within short walking distance from the residents/communities it intended to serve. DOS (e.g. parks and recreation grounds) intended to serve a wider district population, and might incorporate passive and active recreation facilities such as football and mini-soccer pitches, basketball or tennis courts; and
- apart from the population threshold set out in HKPSG, the LCSD would take into account other essential factors, including geographical location and accessibility of the district/area concerned, functions of the open spaces to be provided, site constraints, characteristics of the neighbourhood, views of the district councils ("DCs"), public demand

for different types of recreation facilities, utilisation of existing facilities and availability of resources.

5. On the question of whether the LCSD agreed that, in the absence of the most updated information on the provision of open space in non-LCSD venues mentioned in paragraph 2.5 of the Director of Audit's Report ("Audit Report"), there was a chance that the provision of open space or similar facilities in a district or local level was duplicated, **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** stated in the same letter that:

- in planning the provision of public open space in a certain district, the LCSD would make reference to the most updated open space information provided by the Planning Department ("PlanD"), which covered not only the LCSD's open space but also those provided by the Housing Department, statutory bodies and public open space in private developments;
- the LCSD agreed that it would be beneficial to the planning of open space if the most updated information on the provision of open space in both the LCSD and non-LCSD venues was available. The LCSD understood that the PlanD would update the information on the provision of open space periodically; and
- it should be noted that different types of open space served different purposes and functions. Other than the open space provided by the LCSD which was opened to people from all walks of life, the open space within public or private residential developments, though counted towards the total open space provision, served primarily the respective residents. Hence, the provision of the same or different types of open space in the LCSD and non-LCSD venues in parallel might not result in duplications as they sought to meet different needs or serve different target users.

C. Inspection and monitoring of parks and gardens

6. As revealed in paragraph 3.9(a) of the Audit Report, the LCSD only provided "static staff" to station in major parks and gardens and those provided with fee charging facilities. The Committee enquired whether, and if so, what measures had been taken by the LCSD to ensure that parks and gardens without "static staff" to station in were safe, clean and serviceable for use by the public.

7. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied in the same letter that:

- there were over 1 500 venues of varying scales and sizes under the management of the LCSD. Given the resource constraints and the need to observe cost-effectiveness, the LCSD could only provide "static staff" for its major venues and those with fee-charging facilities. For venues without "static staff", the LCSD would deploy contractor's staff (including cleansing workers and security guards) to carry out regular cleansing and inspection to these venues according to the usage pattern and conditions of the venues. Under the contract, the contractor and its staff were required to report to the LCSD venue management any irregularities found when carrying out the duties in the venues concerned; and
- the district management would arrange departmental staff to conduct regular/routine inspections to those venues without "static staff" in order to ensure that the parks and gardens were safe, clean and serviceable for use by the public.

8. The Committee noted from paragraph 3.12 of the Audit Report that three District Offices adopted different practices for inspecting parks and gardens. The Committee enquired about the reason(s) for such variations and whether consideration would be given to standardizing such practices.

9. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** explained in her letter that:

- according to prevailing departmental guidelines, the responsible District Leisure Manager, the head of the District Leisure Services Office ("DLSO"), could adjust or increase the frequency of inspection to the venues according to operational needs, conditions and specific requirements of the venues. As the types, numbers, distribution, usage pattern of the venues in each of the 18 districts varied to a large extent, the DLSO might have to adopt different practices for inspecting their venues to cater for the requirements of individual venues; and
- the LCSD would review the departmental guidelines, taking into account the Audit recommendations and the operational needs, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness and consistency of the practices adopted for inspection of parks and gardens.

10. According to paragraph 3.18 of the Audit Report, the LCSD has set up a Technical Unit to help maintain playground equipment. As revealed in paragraph 3.19 of the Audit Report, in the past five years from 2008 to 2012, none of the playground equipment had been inspected five times as required. In particular, a large number (306 sets or 78%) of the playground equipment had never been structurally inspected during the period. In view of the safety risk posed by the faulty playground equipment to users who were mainly young children, the Committee enquired about the following:

- whether the LCSD considered an establishment of six technical staff in the Technical Unit could ensure the safety of the playground equipment in parks and gardens, and if not, why no expansion had been made to the establishment of technical staff in the Technical Unit; and
- whether staff of the Technical Unit were required to file a detailed report after inspection; and if so, to whom would the report be submitted and who would follow-up the report.

11. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied in her letter that:

- the LCSD had been reviewing the workload of the Technical Unit and taking necessary measures including but not limited to strengthening the manpower provision of the Technical Unit. On the provision of technical staff, two Clerk of Works ("COW") posts under review had been made permanent in late 2011, representing a 50% increase in the COW strength in the Technical Unit (from four to six). To cope with the continued increase in workload arising from the maintenance responsibilities for new venues as well as the provision of more elderly fitness/playground equipment at parks and playgrounds under the District Minor Works projects, the LCSD would keep the need for additional manpower resources for the Technical Unit under constant review. The LCSD would also seek resources to strengthen the administrative and clerical support for the Technical Unit so as to relieve the technical staff from non-technical duties; and
- upon completion of the annual inspection to playground equipment, the subject COW in the Technical Unit was required to prepare a report for endorsement by the Department's Structural Engineer and to coordinate with the venue staff to arrange for the necessary repairs. If defects were identified by the venue staff during their routine inspections, they would prepare a Defect Report and request the Technical Unit to arrange

repairs to rectify the defects. In addition to the annual inspection, the COW had to cross-check the works inspected by another COW on a bi-monthly basis.

12. The Committee noted from paragraph 3.22(b) of the Audit Report that in order to ensure that adequate structural inspections were conducted for playground equipment in future, the LCSD proposed to prioritize its play equipment into three risk categories, namely, high-risk equipment, medium-risk equipment and low-risk equipment. On the criteria for determining the risk level of the park and playground equipment, **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** advised in her letter as follows:

Risk Level	Criteria	Example of play equipment
High	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cantilever structure; 2. High usage; 3. Has an incident record/history 	Basketball stand frames
Medium	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play equipment with movable components; 2. Relatively high usage; 3. Public concern and complaint/ Integrated Call Centre cases received 	Elderly fitness equipment, children playground equipment
Low	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play equipment without movable components; 2. Medium usage; 3. Infrequent repair 	Other type of fitness and play equipment

D. Repair and maintenance of facilities

13. According to LCSD records, damaged facilities in parks and gardens are a common cause for public complaints. The Committee noted that the reason for taking some 10 months to complete the maintenance works for the damaged matting in Ngau Chi Wan Park's playground (a case referred to in Appendix F of the Audit Report) was due to the tardiness of the contractor to rectify the damaged matting. The Committee asked:

- whether the contractor referred to in Appendix F of the Audit Report had been blacklisted or fined;
- what was the average target time for the maintenance works for damaged matting to be completed; and
- whether the LCSD would consider drawing up a demerit or blacklist system to deter unsatisfactory performance from contractors/suppliers.

14. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied in her letter that:

- after the incident referred to in Appendix F of the Audit Report, the LCSD had not engaged the contractor concerned to carry out works in view of his very poor performance. Furthermore, the LCSD had written to the Housing Department and the Home Affairs Department drawing their attention to the very poor performance of this contractor;
- it would normally take the Technical Unit about three months to effect replacement of safety matting at playgrounds similar to the Ngau Chi Wan Park (several play areas with over 500 square metres matting area in total). Time was required to carry out various tasks including procurement, placing orders, production of safety matting outside Hong Kong, transportation, delivery of materials to site and installation works. To shorten the time required for procuring playground matting, the LCSD had taken measures to stock up safety matting, thereby reducing the time required for production and transportation of the matting from overseas. The LCSD would review the effectiveness of the arrangement and explore other feasible means to improve the process; and
- in engaging contractors for the repair and replacement of playground equipment, their past performance would be one of the major considerations to be taken into account by the LCSD. Apart from site supervision performed by the technical staff, the Technical Unit would also collect appraisal reports from the 18 DLSOs of the LCSD on a quarterly basis to facilitate evaluation of the performance of contractors engaged for replacement and repair of equipment. For contractors who were assessed to have performed poorly, the Technical Unit would refrain from engaging them for further works or services.

15. According to paragraph 4.9 of the Audit Report, a major cause of the delay for completing repair and maintenance of playground facilities in gardens and parks was the lack of spare parts for the repair and maintenance works. The Committee enquired whether the LCSD would consider procuring the spare parts of the same brands as far as practicable so as to minimize procurement difficulty and costs.

16. **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied that the LCSD had taken measures to stock up the most frequently used spare parts for the elderly fitness and playground equipment. Given the large number of equipment and component/spare parts involved, the spare parts to be stocked up might still not be able to meet every replacement need. The LCSD would keep the list of spare parts under review and procure more items to expedite repairs.

17. The Committee notes the above replies of Director of Leisure and Cultural Services and wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.