

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the Government's efforts in enhancing tree safety. Under the integrated approach adopted by the Government, tree maintenance is part and parcel of the duty of the department which uses and manages that particular piece of land or facility. There are currently nine major tree management government departments, including Highways Department, Leisure and Cultural Services Department and Lands Department ("LandsD").

2. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

- there had been disagreements among departments over the delineation of maintenance responsibilities for roadside trees. In June 2014, Tree Management Office ("TMO") completed a roadside tree survey and identified some 70 000 trees not under regular maintenance by any departments;
- trees on unallocated government land under LandsD's purview were subject to ad hoc rather than regular maintenance. A fatal roadside tree collapse case in 2012 unveiled the inadequacies in LandsD's ad hoc maintenance approach;
- there were inadequacies in the tree risk assessment conducted by some departments. For instance, Audit found that the number of trees covered by a group inspection (Form 1 inspection) was excessive and thus not conducive to identifying problematic trees, and some departments, including Leisure and Cultural Services Department, conducted no/few detailed inspections (Form 2 inspections) on the problematic trees identified<sup>1</sup>;
- as at August 2014, there were 16 non-old and valuable trees with brown root rot disease infection pending removal. Removal of some of the trees had been outstanding for a long period<sup>2</sup>;

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1 Under the tree risk assessment dual-approach, a tree management department should classify the sites under its purview into three risk zones (i.e. Category I, II and III). In carrying out a tree-basis assessment of a site, a group inspection (a Form 1 inspection) should be conducted on all trees of the site to identify problematic trees. For problematic trees identified, if the remedial measures taken on the spot cannot eliminate the risks, detailed inspections (Form 2 inspections) should be conducted on them to identify in detail the risks and the appropriate remedial measures.

2 Trees infected with brown root rot disease may experience a rapid deterioration of health and structural conditions and should be removed entirely if they are not old and valuable trees.

- information captured in the Tree Management Information System<sup>3</sup> was incomplete and not updated, and there were data inconsistencies between the system and the departmental systems maintained by tree management departments. Also, in managing the Tree Register<sup>4</sup>, there was a tendency for tree management departments not to add problematic trees to the Tree Register, and some trees with mitigation measures already completed for quite some time were not deleted from the Tree Register; and
- the work of TMO primarily focused on trees maintained by government departments. For trees on private land, their maintenance responsibilities rested with the private land owners concerned. In 2009, the Administration considered that there was no need to introduce any legislative change to regulate the proper maintenance of trees on private land.

3. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding measures adopted by TMO to clearly delineate tree maintenance responsibilities of relevant departments, the conduct of tree risk assessment by tree management departments, enhancements to the Tree Management Information System and the Tree Register and effectiveness of training courses provided by TMO. The replies from **Secretary for Development** are in *Appendix 37*.

4. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.

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3 The Tree Management Information System is a database of trees managed by tree management departments to facilitate central monitoring, coordination, data analysis and reporting.

4 The Tree Register is published on the TMO website to promote community surveillance and to enhance the transparency of the Government's tree risk management work. It includes information on problematic trees with mitigation measures to be completed and important trees.