

**For discussion on  
9 October 2023**

**Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs, Culture and Sports**

**Proposed Amendments to the Places of Amusement Regulation**

**Purpose**

This paper seeks Members' views on the proposed amendments to the Places of Amusement Regulation (Cap. 132BA) (the Regulation) under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance.

2. At present, the Regulation imposes restrictions on admittance to billiard establishments by young people. To promote billiard sports to the younger generation, the Government proposes amending section 22C of the Regulation to relax the restrictions on young people entering billiard establishments with a view to promoting sports. The amendments include:

- (a) relaxing the restriction on young people's entry into licensed billiard establishments by shortening the restricted hours from the current 8:00 p.m. – 10:00 a.m. the next day to 11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m. the next day;
- (b) lowering the minimum age limit from 16 to 8; and
- (c) permitting persons wearing school uniforms to enter licensed billiard establishments.

**Background**

3. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) is responsible for enforcing the Regulation under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance, including issuing licences for the operation of billiard establishments with four tables or more, public bowling-alleys and public skating rinks; maintaining a comprehensive register of each type of licensed premises; and ensuring that the licensees of such establishments comply with

the requirements in respect of fire safety, building safety, health and public interest. Currently, there are 48 licensed billiard establishments in total.

4. According to the Regulation, unless expressly permitted by the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services in writing, the licensee of a billiard establishment shall not permit any person under the age of 16 to enter the premises between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m., or permit any person in school uniform to enter the premises at any time during the business hours. The restrictions stem from the need in the 1960s and 70s to suitably protect mentally immature individuals under the age of 16. As for public bowling-alleys and public skating rinks, there are no such restrictions.

5. To avoid hindering young people from participating in billiard sports, under the current mechanism, if (i) those under the age of 16 need to enter billiard establishments after 8:00 p.m., or (ii) those in school uniforms need to enter billiard establishments to attend billiard competitions or training sessions organised by the “national sports association” (NSA) concerned, the licensees of the billiard establishments may seek exemption from the above restrictions from the LCSD. When submitting the applications, the licensees of the billiard establishments must provide details of the events, personal particulars of those wishing to enter the billiard establishments, and authorisation forms from parents or guardians of those under the age of 16 to the LCSD for vetting. Since 2021, the LCSD has received a total of 13 applications with applicants aged between 9 and 15 in this regard, all of which have been approved.

### **Development of Billiard Sports and Public Concerns**

6. In recent years, numerous world-class players and young stars have emerged in Hong Kong’s billiard scene. The Hong Kong Masters 2022, which was held locally in October 2022, brought together elite players from around the globe for an intense competition. Hong Kong billiard athlete Marco FU won the first runner-up prize in the tournament with a record-setting 147 maximum break, stirring unprecedented passions for the international event throughout the city. Excellent performance is also seen

in female billiard athletes. In recent years, NG On-ye and Katrina WAN have become internationally acclaimed for winning various prestigious awards in worldwide and domestic billiard competitions. Moreover, billiard sports are gaining popularity with the younger generation. In April this year, the 12-year-old Shaun LIU became the first Hong Kong billiard athlete to claim the 2023 English Under-14 Snooker Championship held in Britain.

7. Many people in the society suggest that young people should be introduced to billiard sports as early as possible to nurture a new generation of billiard athletes. They opine that the existing legislation hinders young people from participating in billiard sports and stigmatises billiard sports as undesirable activities, thereby impeding its popularisation and development. In addition, relevant NSA and the industry also consider that youngsters today (8 years old or above) are physically suitable, including height and hand-eye coordination, to participate in billiard sports. The Government should provide young people with more opportunities to take part in training, competitions or other activities related to billiard. Some are of the view that the Government should make available of the existing resources for young people to participate in billiard activities without restricting the time and attire of entry. This would help attract them participate in the sports and thereby fostering the sustainable and possibly more advanced development of billiard sports in Hong Kong.

8. In fact, the Government has refined the licensing system of licensed billiard establishments over the years, and conducted more inspections. The environment of billiard establishments has been greatly improved in recent years. In addition, local billiard sports athletes, including junior players, have won multiple prestigious awards in international and local competitions in recent years. This has not only greatly enhanced the image of billiard sports, but also won wider recognition and support of the sports from the general public, including parents and young people. They make use of the billiard sports facilities of the LCSD and licensed billiard establishments more often and enjoy the fun of the sports, thereby fostering its sustainable development.

## **Consultation with Relevant Bureaux/Commission**

9. With regard to the proposed repeal of relevant regulation restricting admittance of young people to billiard establishments, the LCSD has consulted relevant bureaux, including the Security Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau and the Labour and Welfare Bureau. All bureaux maintained an open attitude and had no special comments.

10. Moreover, the LCSD put forward two options for consulting the members of the Working Group on Children Protection under the Commission on Children at the meeting held on 25 July 2023. Option 1 was to completely repeal section 22C of the Regulation, meaning people of all ages, regardless of their attire, would be permitted to enter licensed billiard establishments anytime during the business hours of such premises. Option 2 was to relax the restrictions on age limit and admittance hours to billiard establishments only as mentioned in paragraph 2 above (i.e. lowering the age limit from 16 to 8 and shortening the restricted hours from the current 8:00 p.m. – 10:00 a.m. the next day to 11:00 p.m. – 7:00 a.m. the next day) as well as to permit persons wearing school uniforms to enter licensed billiard establishments. All members expressed support for Option 2 for the following reasons:

- (a) The proposal to push back the last admittance for young people entering licensed billiard establishments to 11:00 p.m. was deemed appropriate as this would allow them to have more time for rest and stay healthy. In other words, it was considered not appropriate for young people to stay in billiard establishments till late night; and
- (b) The proposal to lower the minimum age to 8 to cater for the training and competition needs of young athletes, which had made reference to how young people engaged in training/competition, was supported. In fact, those under the age of 16 who applied to the LCSD in the past two years for exemption from the age restriction on the grounds that they needed to enter billiard establishments after 8:00 p.m. to attend billiard competitions or training sessions organised by the NSA concerned were all aged between 9 and 15.

## Proposed Amendments

11. The LCSD is committed to striking a balance between promoting billiard sports and minimising the adverse effect on young people. Therefore, taking the current opening hours of LCSD leisure venues (i.e. from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.) as reference, the LCSD proposes that young people be allowed to enter licensed billiard establishments for training, competitions or other activities related to billiard during this period. Regarding the age restriction, there is no limit set for the vast majority of leisure facilities<sup>1</sup> managed by the LCSD. With reference to the age range of persons applying for an exemption from the restriction on entering licensed billiard establishments in the past two years as mentioned in paragraph 5 above, the LCSD proposes that the age limit be lowered from 16 to 8 in order to further increase the opportunities for young people to participate in activities related to billiard. As for the arrangement of permitting persons wearing school uniforms to enter licensed billiard establishments anytime, it will allow young people to use billiards facilities and participate in billiards activities without clothing restrictions, saving their time in changing clothes and increasing the number of hours they can participate in activities.

12. To implement the abovementioned proposals, the LCSD needs to make the following amendments to the Regulation:

(i) Section 22C(a) of the Regulation is to be amended as follows:

Unless expressly permitted by the Director in writing, the licensee of a billiard establishment shall not —

(a) permit any person under the age of 8 years to enter the licensed premises between the hours of 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.;

(ii) Section 22C(b) of the Regulation is to be repealed:

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the restriction imposed out of safety concerns on facilities such as aquatic venues and skateparks.

Unless expressly permitted by the Director in writing, the licensee of a billiard establishment shall not —

- (b) permit any person in school uniform, whether in full or in part, or whether wholly or partly covered, to enter the licensed premises at any time during the business hours of the licensed premises.

### **Way Forward**

13. The above proposal would allow more young people to have access to billiard activities and encourage their active participation in billiard sports, which will be conducive to the development of such sports in Hong Kong. The above proposed legislative amendments will bring about benefits and thus is expected to receive wide recognition from various sectors of the community. Subject to Members' support, the proposed amendments to the Regulation is expected to be tabled at a Legislative Council meeting in the fourth quarter of this year for negative vetting. The amended Regulation will be implemented in the first quarter of next year.

### **Advice Sought**

14. Members are invited to note the above proposed legislative amendments and provide their views.

**Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau**  
**Leisure and Cultural Services Department**  
**October 2023**