

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2009-10
**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION**

Reply Serial No.

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Question Serial No.

0592

Head : 82 Buildings Department Subhead (No. & title) :

Programme : Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer : Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Development

Question :

What were the difficulties encountered by the Joint Office (JO) when handling water seepage problems? Are there any measures to enhance its effectiveness? What is the amount of resources involved for extending the operation of the JO for three more years? Will additional resources be provided to enhance its effectiveness?

Asked by : Hon. TO Kun-sun, James

Reply :

Identification of the possible source(s) of water seepage is not a straightforward matter and is often complicated by the fact that there may be more than one possible source of water seepage in any single case. Moreover, as water seepage usually occurs in residential premises, the Joint Office (JO) uses non-destructive testing methods for identification. These include colour water test, flow meter test, reversible pressure test, water ponding test and infrared thermal test for investigation of water seepage complaints. A series of tests are performed to establish the source of seepage by elimination of other sources. Cooperation of the concerned owners/occupiers is critical to JO staff's entry into premises to conduct such multiple tests. In many cases, repeated arrangements have to be made with complainants and other respondents of different units in the building concerned in allowing inspections and testings to be conducted inside their premises. In the event that the respondents are unwilling to cooperate, the JO may have to apply to the Court for a Warrant of Entry in order to complete the investigation. The above processes are inevitably time-consuming.

The JO has completed an interim review of its three-year pilot operation. Based on the results of the interim review and the recommendations in the Ombudsman's direct investigation report released in early 2008, the JO has implemented various improvement measures, including issuing clearer internal guidelines for investigation, establishing milestones to monitor the progress of various stages of investigation, issuing clearer internal circulars for deciding whether to exercise power of entry under the Public Health and Municipal Services

Ordinance, enhancing information processing and communications within the various units of the JO, etc. The JO has also issued clearer guidelines and performance milestones to the consultants it hired and standardised the format of documents. It will also formulate criteria and guidelines for the Office to take over from consultants the investigation of cases with serious delay. These measures will further enhance the efficiency of the JO. We will continue to examine further improvement measures with experience gained.

The Buildings Department will extend its participation in the operation of the JO for three more years with an additional provision of \$87.342 million. The annual provision in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 will be \$29.114 million each year, compared with the annual provision of \$26.488 million in 2008-09.

Signature	_____
Name in block letters	<u> AU Choi-kai </u>
Post Title	<u> Director of Buildings </u>
Date	<u> 16 March 2009 </u>