

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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(Question Serial No. 2761)

Head: (82) Buildings Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (1) Buildings and Building Works
Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings (CHEUNG Tin-cheung)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

There was an increase of 86 posts in 2016-17 for the Buildings Department (BD), including conversion of existing non-civil service contract positions to civil service posts for the continued implementation of the initiatives in enhancing building safety. Among the 86 posts, 40 posts were engaged in conducting large scale operations against unauthorised building works (UBWs) and clearing outstanding removal orders; 11 posts were engaged in expediting the processing of new building plans; 29 posts were allocated to the Joint Office set up by the BD and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department to tackle public reports on water seepage; and the remaining six posts were deployed to various sections/units of the BD to strengthen the administrative and clerical support for their respective areas of work. In this connection, would the authorities inform this Committee:

- a. whether the net increase of 55 posts in 2017-18 are related to the above areas of work;
- b. despite the increase in manpower and estimates in 2016-17, no improvement was observed in the actual performance of “processing building plans” in 2016, and it was even worse than that of 2015; What are the reasons for that?
- c. was there any improvement made in the areas of “conducting large scale operations against UBWs and clearing outstanding removal orders” and “tackling public reports on water seepage” after the increase in manpower and estimates in 2016-17?

Asked by: Hon LAU Kwok-fan (Member Question No. 51)

Reply:

- a. The net increase of 55 posts in the Buildings Department (BD) in 2017-18 involves the creation of 56 non-directorate posts, to be offset by the expiry of one time-limited technical post.

Among the 56 posts to be created, 54 posts will be engaged to step up enforcement actions in industrial buildings to improve fire safety and to enhance building safety in non-industrial buildings; and two posts will be engaged to process applications for approval of plans, consent for commencement of works and occupation permits and

related matters in relation to the Three-Runway System Project at the Hong Kong International Airport.

- b. The cases where the processing time of building plans exceeded 60 days (for new submissions) or 30 days (for re-submissions) involved situations where the BD had already finished vetting the building plans, and considered that such applications could be approved subject to minor amendments or further particulars to be furnished by the applicants. In such cases, the BD would allow the applicants to make the minor amendments or furnish the required particulars after the stipulated target date. This is a practice well-accepted by the industry for streamlining the processing of applications, and is preferred to the alternative of rejecting the applications before the stipulated target date which would cost the BD and the applicants extra time and efforts to restart the entire vetting process. The increase in such cases in 2016 as compared with 2015 was due to the increase in both the total number of buildings plans processed by BD (from 18 458 in 2015 to 18 723 in 2016) and the number of applicants adopting the aforesaid facilitating practice.
- c. With the additional resources in 2016-17, the BD has stepped up the clearance of removal orders and expedited completion of large scale operations. Comparing with the performance in 2015, the number of unauthorised building works removed increased from 24 362 to 26 430, the number of prosecutions against failure to comply with removal orders increased from 3 030 to 3 362 and the number of sub-divided flats with irregularities rectified increased from 207 to 254.

The additional posts allocated to the Joint Office (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the BD in 2016-17 were mainly for converting non-civil service contract posts to civil service posts without actual increase in manpower. Notwithstanding this, the JO is pursuing a series of improvement measures to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in handling reports on water seepage, including enhancing its management information system to ensure timely handling of cases, improving its record keeping and filing system, stepping up monitoring of outsourced consultants' performance, continuing the consultancy study on the latest technological methods with a view to identifying the source of water seepage more effectively and fostering building owners' awareness of their responsibilities in building maintenance and repair through publicity and public education.

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