

## **COMMUNITY SPORTS COMMITTEE**

### **The Services at Public Swimming Pools and Bathing Beaches To be Affected by the Lifeguards' Industrial Action**

#### **PURPOSE**

We learned that the Hong Kong Life Guards' Union (the Union) had intended to take strike action on 1 August 2005 (Monday) to protest against the outsourcing of the management work of the soon-to-be-completed Tai Kok Tsui Sports Centre and its swimming pools by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). The Union estimated that 800 to 1 000 lifeguards would take part in the industrial action and called on members of the public not to go swimming at public swimming pools and bathing beaches that day. This Paper seeks to report to Members on the situation.

#### **OUTSOURCING THE MANAGEMENT SERVICES OF TAI KOK TSUI SPORTS CENTRE/SWIMMING POOL**

2. Given the government policy of freezing the civil service establishment, the LCSD is unable to create new management posts for the newly-completed facilities. Hence, we need to outsource the services of either the newly-completed or existing facilities upon the completion of any new facilities so that manpower can be spared and redeployed to cope with the management work of the newly-completed facilities. Ten sports centres, including Island East Sports Centre and its swimming pools, have so far been outsourced. Such outsourcing arrangements will not in any way affect the existing staff.

3. We will adopt the following criteria when outsourcing services:

- (a) Contracting out the services is cost-effective;

- (b) Contracting out the services can bring in the operation mode of the private sector so as to raise the standard of the services;
- (b) Contracting out the services will not lower the standard of service delivery; and
- (d) It will not lead to staff redundancy.

4. Tai Kok Tsui Sports Centre, which will be completed by the end of this year, has the basic facilities of a sports centre as well as a leisure pool and a 25-metre training pool. As we are unable to recruit additional staff to manage the newly-completed facilities, we will outsource the management work of Tai Kok Tsui Sports Centre, basing on the outsourcing arrangements for Island East Sports Centre which has similar facilities. The Union raised the point that the outsourcing arrangement would affect the staff's employment opportunities. In fact, the outsourcing of the management of the newly-completed Tai Kok Tsui Sports Centre/Swimming Pool will not in any way affect the existing staff. (Neither serving civil servants will be made redundant nor the contracts of the existing non-civil service full-year contract staff will be affected as a result of the outsourcing arrangement.)

5. The Union also pointed out that outsourcing would lower service quality. In this connection, we are committed to overseeing the outsourced services and urging the contractors to provide the public with services that are up to standard. We will implement the following measures in monitoring the performance of the contractors:

- (a) To ensure that the outsourced services can meet the required standards, we have stated clearly in the contract the requirements and standards of various services to be offered (including the provisions on safety stipulating that lifeguards should have the required qualifications and be holders of valid Pool Lifeguard Award and that the standard number of lifeguards should be the same as that of all other LCSD swimming pools). Apart from this, we will also conduct regular inspections to the venue and mount surprise checks so as to ensure that the contractors have complied with the contract terms;
- (b) Members of the public can also assist in monitoring the

performance of the contractors by expressing their views in written forms, by telephone/calling the complaint hotline and attending customer liaison meetings;

- (c) Each District Leisure Services Office (DLSO) is required to submit to the headquarters a monthly assessment report on the contractors. If any contractor fails to comply with the contract terms, the officer-in-charge of the DLSO will issue an advisory letter to the contractor concerned and, in accordance with the contract, may deduct the monthly fee payable to the contractor. Should the contractor fail to make any improvement, the Department will arrange an interview with the contractor and issue a warning letter to him/her. The poor performance of the contractor will be put on record for future reference by the Department in the event of selecting a contractor for providing similar service; and
- (d) To monitor more effectively the contractors presently managing the outsourced sports centres (including the swimming pools in Island East Sports Centre), the Department has specially set up a standing committee chaired by the Deputy Director (Leisure Services) that holds meetings regularly with district representatives. It seeks to strengthen communication among districts and share with them the problems encountered and the experience in monitoring the contractors, with a view to mapping out more effective measures to enhance the management of the outsourced sports centres.

6. The LCSD has so far outsourced the management of ten sports centres. The results are satisfactory with favourable response from the public. According to the service records on the management of the outsourced Island East Sports Centre/Swimming Pool over the past four years, the overall performance has been satisfactory and the service standard acceptable to the public. Between February and March this year, the LCSD engaged an independent consultancy firm to conduct a questionnaire survey on the satisfaction degree of the customers regarding the management level of Island East Sports Centre. Findings of the survey showed that nearly 90% of the respondents ranked the overall standards of services provided at the swimming

pools as “satisfactory”. The above data indicate that members of the public are generally satisfied with the services provided at the swimming pools in Island East Sports Centre after the outsourcing of its management work. With the same principle in mind, we therefore consider it feasible to outsource the management work of Tai Kok Tsui Sports Centre and its swimming pools.

7. There has also been a very good record on lifesaving and safety at the swimming pools in Island East Sports Centre. No serious incident has ever occurred since the outsourcing of the pool management. Please refer to the Annex for the Records of Aquatic Accidents and Rescues at the swimming pools after the outsourcing arrangement.

8. Moreover, the swimming pools in the LCSD holiday camps (including the Lady MacLehose Holiday Village, the Sai Kung Outdoor Recreation Centre and the Tso Kung Tam Outdoor Recreation Centre), with its management work outsourced a number of years ago, have all along been operating very well. No complaints from campers about the pool service standard have ever been received.

9. There are presently more than 900 swimming pools in the private sector and a majority of them are managed by contractors. The total number of lifeguards employed is over 2 000. There is no evidence of any kind to indicate that the service standard of the management of private pools is lower than that of the public swimming pools.

## **MAINTENANCE OF COMMUNICATION WITH THE UNION**

10. Having called on the Union to attach importance to serving the community, keep calm and maintain communication with the Department in order to solve the problem, we have also arranged meetings with the Union. We have called on all lifeguards to stay in their posts and safeguard the swimmers’ safety, so as to avoid undermining public services and affecting members of the public.

## **CONTINGENCY MEASURES**

11. If the Union takes industrial actions, we will adopt appropriate contingency measures by seeking assistance from other parties (including

requesting honorary lifeguards from the Auxiliary Medical Service and the Hong Kong Life Saving Society). Holding fast to the principle of “safety first”, we will maintain our services as far as possible. We also hope that Members will express their views on other ways to maintain the services at swimming pools and bathing beaches (such as inviting private lifeguard agencies to provide lifesaving assistance). We will definitely put public safety before anything else and, subject to actual circumstances, will not rule out the possibility of affecting the services of some swimming facilities. We will let members of the public know the situation as early as possible and call on swimmers to stay alert.

12. We also intend to invite Members and representatives of the District Councils to visit the swimming pools that day so as to let them have a clear picture of the situation.

#### **ADVICE SOUGHT**

13. Members are invited to note the contents of this Paper.

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Leisure and Cultural Services Department  
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