

Press release

LCQ15: Payment of government fees

Wednesday, January 19, 2011

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Kwok-hung and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Professor K C Chan, in the Legislative Council today (January 19):

Question:

Quite a number of groups for elderly people and persons with disabilities (PWDs) have complained to me that while members of the public can at present pay their telephone, electricity and gas bills and even public rental housing (PRH) rent at convenience stores near their residence, government bills for water charges, rates and government rent can only be settled at post offices or other designated places. These groups have pointed out that since the places designated for payment of such government fees are not as numerous in number as convenience stores, members of the public, particularly the elderly and PWDs, have found it very inconvenient to pay these bills. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether the Government will immediately include all convenience stores in the list of places for payment of water charges, rates and government rent, so as to facilitate members of the public (particularly the elderly and PWDs) to pay such bills; if so, when it will do so; if not, of the reasons for that;

(b) whether the Government will, for the sake of facilitating members of the public to pay various bills, immediately increase the number of post offices in various districts to put it on a par with the number of convenience stores; if it will, when it will do so; if not, of the reasons for that;

(c) of the numbers and percentages of members of the public who paid water charges, rates and government rent at post offices and other designated places in each of the past five years; and

(d) of the number of convenience stores in Hong Kong through which the Hong Kong Housing Authority collects PRH rent at present, as well as the existing number of places designated for payment of water charges, rates and government rent?

Reply:

President,

(a) To make it more convenient for members of the public to pay bills, the Government plans to extend the network for collecting payment of water charges, rates and government rent, etc. to include collection points run by private operators. The Treasury is preparing for the tender exercise which is expected to commence in the first half of this year. Upon completion of the tender procedures, the bill-issuing departments (such as Water Supplies Department (WSD) and Rating and Valuation Department) and payment collection service providers (including convenience stores and other designated collection points) will have to align the computer systems concerned within six months. It is anticipated that the extended service can be introduced in early 2012. Collecting payment through collection points run by private operators is a new government initiative. That apart, as the initiative involves a number of government departments and service providers, and that these departments have different operational needs, the new service will be rolled out on a trial basis in one department first. Subject to the smooth operation of the system, we would extend the new service to other departments.

(b) The existing 126 post offices and the two mobile post offices can generally satisfy public needs for postal services. In deciding whether or not a new post office is required, Hongkong Post will make reference to the guidance set out in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines and take into account factors such as the overall development of the district concerned, its demand for postal service types and levels as well as the need for effective use of resources.

(c) Statistics on the number of water bills as well as rates and government rent bills paid at post offices, and water bills paid at the WSD Customer Enquiry Centre in the past five years are set out in the Annex.

(d) Currently, public housing tenants can pay rent at 965 convenience stores throughout the territory and the customer service centres at 83 Mass Transit Railway stations. As for water charges, rates and government rent, the public can make payment at 126 post offices. They can also pay water charges at the WSD Customer Enquiry Centre in Mong Kok.

Ends