

## **LEGCO QUESTION NO. 18**

(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon TAM Yiu-chung

Date of meeting: 22 November 2006

Replied by: Secretary for Economic  
Development and Labour

### **Question**

The Government is currently holding discussions with the tourism sector on how to raise the service standard of local travel agents in receiving tour groups from the Mainland, and on how to enhance communication among various parties within the sector. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council whether it plans to:

- (a) request the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong ("TICHK") or the Consumer Council to publish the names of those travel agents which have seriously violated the rules, thereby strengthening the protection of consumers' rights and interests; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
- (b) appoint representatives from unions of tour guides to the TICHK's Board of Directors, so that the views of tour guides can be reflected; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (c) set up a quadripartite working group (comprising representatives from the Government, unions of tour guides, travel agents and the TICHK) to jointly work out measures to facilitate the healthy development of the tourism industry; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

## Reply

Madam President,

- (a) According to the existing disciplinary mechanism of the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong (TIC), travel agents which are suspected to have contravened the TIC Code of Business Practice (Code) or Directives will be investigated by the TIC. When there is prima facie evidence of non-compliance, the cases will be considered by the TIC Compliance Committee. Taking into consideration the evidence available, the grounds of defence, and the seriousness of the case, the Compliance Committee will take appropriate disciplinary actions against the travel agents concerned in accordance with the stipulated penalty provisions, which include the issue of a warning letter, the imposition of a fine and the suspension or termination of membership.

In order to expedite the processing of non-compliance cases concerning Mainland tour groups, the TIC Board of Directors decided on 14 November 2006 to establish a new committee specially tasked to consider and take disciplinary actions against such cases. As these non-compliance cases normally involve travel agents and tour guides, the new committee's ambit will cover both parties. This will expedite the processing of these cases as well as enable the committee to have a better grasp of the non-compliance situation. The committee will be chaired by a non-trade Independent Director of the TIC, and have a majority of non-trade independent members. To enhance the deterrent effect, the TIC Board of Directors has agreed to increase the level of fines from \$10,000-\$100,000 to \$50,000-\$200,000. Apart from the on-going practice of disclosing in the TIC's quarterly publication names of the travel agents who have been disciplined, the nature of their non-compliance, and the sanctions imposed, the TIC has also decided to upload such information onto its website, so as to keep the public abreast of the latest situation. For serious cases, the TIC will consider issuing press releases to inform the public.

- (b) The TIC is responsible for regulating the daily operation of travel agents. To enhance the quality of service provided to inbound tour groups, the

TIC has introduced the Tourist Guide Accreditation Scheme by issuing Tourist Guide Passes to tour guides who have attended the training and passed the relevant examination. The TIC requires travel agents to employ only tour guides with a valid Tourist Guide Pass to provide guide service to their inbound tour groups. The Scheme helps enhance the professional image and service standard of tour guides. The TIC has also set up a Tourist Guide Deliberation Committee and a Training Committee. The former is responsible for all matters related to the disciplinary issues of tour guides, whereas the latter is responsible for the training, skill upgrading and continuous training for tour guides. While professional tour guides currently participate in the two committees, the TIC is actively considering increasing the number of professional tour guides on these two committees. In addition, the TIC is considering the appointment of professional tour guides to the new compliance committee.

- (c) The Tourism Commission has been maintaining dialogues with tour guide organisations as well as other related groups in the tourism industry on issues of common concern. Recently, the Tourism Commission has had in-depth discussions with the tour guide organizations, on problems associated with “zero fare” tours, with a view to improving the situation. The Tourism Commission will continue to engage the TIC, tour guide organizations and inbound travel agent organizations from time to time to discuss issues concerning the trade.

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