

LCQ19: Quality Tourism Services Scheme

Following is a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Gregory So, to a question by the Hon Paul Tse in the Legislative Council today (June 1):

Question:

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) outsourced the daily operation of the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme in December 2010, and all mediation work regarding complaints involving QTS-certified merchants is passed to the Consumer Council (CC) for central handling since February this year. A merchant who participated in QTS Scheme has complained to me that the quality of QTS Scheme has been deteriorating since HKTB outsourced the operation of the Scheme, and that HKTB has turned a blind eye to the suspected "unauthorised use" of the QTS decals by some merchants for a long time. The merchant who lodged the complaint eventually decided to withdraw from the Scheme. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the reasons for HKTB to outsource QTS Scheme; the amount of expenditure so reduced; the monitoring policy on QTS Scheme after outsourcing; whether QTS-certified merchants were consulted before and after the outsourcing of QTS Scheme;

(b) given that according to the aforesaid complaint, some merchants have made "unauthorised use" of the QTS decals for as long as six months but HKTB still turns a blind eye to it, whether it knows the reasons for that and the number of similar complaint cases received;

(c) whether it knows if the arrangement for CC to centrally handle all mediation work regarding complaints involving QTS-certified merchants was made on the basis of the consideration to enhance efficiency in resolving complaints; and what data are available to reflect the effectiveness of this measure; and

(d) whether it knows if CC needs to set aside additional funding and manpower resources to deal with the increased number of complaint cases arising from the aforesaid "outsourcing" arrangement?

Reply:

President,

Launched in 1999, the Quality Tourism Services (QTS) Scheme (the Scheme) currently covers sectors like retail and dining, visitor accommodation and hair-dressing, with a total of over 7 300 accredited merchant outlets. The Scheme has a stringent accreditation, assessment and monitoring mechanism to ensure that accredited merchants will provide and maintain quality services.

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(a) Being a statutory subvented organisation responsible for marketing and promoting Hong Kong globally as a preferred travel destination, the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) regularly reviews its operation for better resource deployment and operational efficiency in carrying out its tasks under its terms of reference.

In December 2010, the HKTb appointed a contractor to take up the daily operation of the QTS Scheme so that it can focus resources on the promotion of the Scheme. Annual savings expected to be achieved from the outsourcing is about \$2 million, which is deployed to step up promotion of the Scheme. Details of the promotional activities being launched are as follows:

* In April and May 2011, the HKTb, in collaboration with the Quality Tourism Services Association, organised large scale road shows with 21 QTS-accredited merchants in major cities such as Shanghai, Chongqing, Changsha and Guangzhou, to promote the Scheme to the Mainland consumers;

* in partnership with the Mainland media, the HKTb invited QTS-accredited merchants to take part in the "Most Popular QTS Merchant Awards" activity in May 2011, in which Mainland consumers would vote for the most popular merchants on the Internet. The awards, which serve to increase the exposure of these merchants in the Mainland, will be presented to the top 10 merchants in June 2011; and

* in June 2011, the HKTb will present the "Outstanding QTS Merchant Awards" and "10-year QTS Merchant Recognition" to all qualified QTS-accredited merchants, so as to increase their media coverage and enhance their brand image.

The HKTB, which maintains close contact with the QTS-accredited merchants, has notified the merchants of the outsourcing arrangement to ensure that the new arrangement will not affect the quality of the Scheme and the support to be rendered to the merchants.

(b) The HKTB closely monitors the overall operation of the Scheme and the service quality of the QTS-accredited merchants, and endeavours to prevent unauthorised use of the QTS decal. Where non-accredited merchants have been found to be displaying the QTS decal, the HKTB will issue warning letters to demand immediate removal of the sign. If the merchants concerned do not comply, the HKTB will take legal actions against them. Since December 2010, two unauthorised use of the QTS decal cases have been detected by the HKTB during inspection. The merchants concerned have already removed the decal after receiving warning letters from the HKTB.

Recently, the media reported about a case of unauthorised use of the QTS decal for six months. Upon receiving the complaint, the HKTB immediately issued a warning letter to the merchant concerned who had subsequently removed the decal. During this year, apart from the aforesaid case, the HKTB received another complaint about unauthorised use of the QTS decal. For the latter case, the HKTB's investigation after inspection was that the merchant concerned had not displayed the QTS decal.

(c) In the past, with the exception of those cases related to the QTS-accredited merchants, the HKTB referred visitors' complaints on their consumption in Hong Kong to the Consumer Council (CC) for handling. Starting from February 2011, with the consent of the CC, the HKTB referred all visitors' complaints about their consumption in Hong Kong, including those involving the QTS-accredited merchants, to CC for handling.

The above arrangement enables the HKTB to focus its resources on analysing the complaint cases and providing assistance to the QTS-accredited merchants in a more targeted manner to enhance service quality. The HKTB also conducts surprise visits to the QTS-accredited merchants. If there are any service areas that are identified for improvement, the HKTB will approach the merchant concerned direct to advise them on improvement measures.

(d) The CC carries out the work mentioned in (c) above, including handling of complaints related to QTS-accredited merchants, with its existing resources. No additional expenditure is incurred.

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