

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

(Question Serial No. 1813)

Head: (95) Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): ()

Programme: (1) Recreation and Sports

Controlling Officer: Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Vincent LIU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism

Question:

Regarding the operation of the new intelligent sports and recreation services booking and information system SmartPLAY (the SmartPLAY system), would the Government inform this Committee of the following:

- (1) a comparison of the following information between the Leisure Link Computerised Booking System and the SmartPLAY system in table form: (i) the number of registered users, (ii) the number of hours booked for recreation and sports facilities via the systems, (iii) the number of bookings made for recreation and sports facilities via the systems, (iv) the amount of payment handled via the systems and (v) the average time required for processing bookings;
- (2) the number of complaints received by the Government each month due to system malfunctions or faults since the launch of the SmartPLAY system;
- (3) a tabulated breakdown of the number of cases of malfunctions or faults of the SmartPLAY system by nature of malfunction, including but not limited to double booking, charging wrong amount of booking fee and unavailability of self check-in service;
- (4) the total number of hours of disruption of facility booking services due to malfunctions of the SmartPLAY system;
- (5) the expenditure on system repair and maintenance arisen from the malfunctions mentioned in (3) and (4);
- (6) a breakdown of the number of calls to the SmartPLAY hotline each month by nature of enquiry;
- (7) the amount of additional staff employed by the Government to assist members of the public in the use of the SmartPLAY system and the expenditure incurred;

- (8) the number of SmartPLAY customer service ambassadors stationing at recreation venues daily, broken down by District Council district;
- (9) the following information since the launch of the SmartPLAY system: (i) the number of complaints about suspected touting activities received by the Government; (ii) the number of cases of suspended right for booking fee-charging facilities due to the breaching of “not taking up booked session(s)/not being present during the use of the booked session(s)” on two occasions within 30 consecutive days; (iii) the number of cases of denied use of facilities due to inconsistency between the information on the identity document provided by the facility user (including the hirer and the user(s) of the venue) and the information provided for making the booking; (iv) the number of breaches spotted by Government staff during inspections; and (v) the number of prosecutions made by the Government due to illegal transfer of the user permit by the hirer;
- (10) as it has been reported that in recent months, there are still “venue touting gangs” soliciting handling charges for booking facilities on behalf of others illegally, and selling the facility sessions by guaranteeing to check in and be present throughout the booked session, whether the Government will consider amending the Places of Public Entertainment Ordinance to criminalise touting of sessions of facilities under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and adopting other measures to combat touting activities; if so, the details of the measures; if not, the reasons for that;
- (11) the reduction in manpower requirement anticipated by the Government from streamlined operation procedures with the use of the SmartPLAY system; and
- (12) the expenditure involved in continuing to develop the SmartPLAY system and launching the enhanced functions of phase 2.

Asked by: Hon LAM Chun-sing (LegCo internal reference no.: 5)

Reply:

- (1) As the new intelligent sports and recreation services booking and information system SmartPLAY (the new system) was just officially launched on 9 November 2023, only about 4 months’ statistics are available at present. Therefore, for items (ii), (iii) and (iv), a comparison is made between the average monthly figures for the Leisure Link Computerised Booking System (Leisure Link) and the new system in the same months. Information on Leisure Link and the new system is as follows:

	Item	Leisure Link	The new system
(i)	Number of registered users	448 000 (as at 5 November 2023)	500 000 (as at 29 February 2024)
(ii)	Average total number of hours/sessions booked for recreation and sports facilities via the systems per month	661 460#	800 006*
(iii)	Average number of booking transactions made for	295 494#	326 548*

	Item	Leisure Link	The new system
	recreation and sports facilities via the systems per month		
(iv)	Average amount of payment handled via the systems per month	\$26,142,376#	\$31,483,864*
(v)	Average time required for processing bookings during morning peak hours (i.e. 7:00-7:30 a.m.)	About 2.5 to 3 minutes (via the online system)	About 1.8 minutes

Leisure Link: the average monthly figures from 1 November 2022 to 28 February 2023

* The new SmartPLAY System: the average monthly figures from 9 November 2023 to 29 February 2024

- (2), (3) & (6) Different issues had arisen when the new system was first launched, including system instability that had resulted in login difficulty, slow system response, double bookings, and duplicate or rejected payment. With the meticulous adjustments and enhancements by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the contractor, the system is operating smoothly now. Meanwhile, members of the public have also familiarised themselves with the operation of the new system. According to the public opinion survey on the new system conducted by the LCSD in late February 2024, the majority of the public has positive comments about the system, especially regarding the booking of non-fee charging hard-surface ball courts, means of e-payment, self check-in and taking up of booked facilities. The comments received in recent months are mainly recommendations for enhancement, including such aspects as the uploading of qualifications, procedures and quotas for balloting, search function and check-in via smartphones. The LCSD will continue to closely monitor the system and make appropriate adjustments when necessary to meet the public's needs. With respect to the enquiries and complaints concerning the new system (including cases referred from the enquiry hotline, 1823 and other channels), the daily number of cases received has dropped from about 600 during the initial period of implementation to an average of about 200 in February this year.
- (4) Although the new system had been unstable when it was first launched, its services were not suspended. Since the launch of the new system, there has been an average of over 10 000 successful bookings daily.
- (5) The cost of enhancement during system nursing is already included in the estimated expenditure of \$500 million for the whole development project. As the new system has just been launched, the project is still under the nursing period and has not entered the maintenance stage. The estimated maintenance cost is thus currently not available.

- (7) & (8) The LCSD has set aside about \$30 million for the employment of customer service ambassadors at major recreation and sports venues in the 18 districts, including the District Leisure Services Offices (DLSO), sports centres, major parks, public swimming pools, holiday camps and water sports centres. From June 2023 to February 2024, customer service ambassadors were present for about 8 hours daily to assist venue users, including elderly ones, with user registration and operation of the new system, and handle their enquiries. As each district would deploy customer service ambassadors to various venues according to actual circumstances, the number of customer service ambassadors stationing at each recreation and sports venue in the 18 districts daily was subject to adjustment, and relevant details are not available.
- (9) From the launch of the new system on 9 November 2023 till 29 February 2024, the LCSD received a total of 15 complaints about suspected touting activities. After preliminary investigations, there was insufficient evidence to prove that the cases involved breaches of “Conditions of Use of Recreation and Sports Facilities” (“Conditions of Use”) or constituted illegal acts. As stipulated in the LCSD’s “Conditions of Use”, hirers must check in for the use of the facilities at SmartPLAY smart self-service stations or self-service check-in devices before using the facilities, and be present during the booked session(s). Any hirer who has failed to take up and/or be present during booked session(s) on 2 occasions within 60 consecutive days will be suspended from booking LCSD fee-charging facilities for 90 days. From 9 November 2023 to 29 February 2024, a total of 278 hirers had been suspended from booking LCSD fee-charging facilities for 90 days due to failure to take up and/or be present during the booked session(s) on 2 cumulative occasions. Moreover, during the aforementioned period, there had been no cases of hirers being refused the use of facilities due to inconsistency between the identity document and the booking record, nor were there cases where unauthorised transfer of user permit had led to prosecution.
- (10) The LCSD has been examining the possibility of imposing deterrent criminal penalties or fines on persons engaging in unauthorised transfer of the user permit of facilities pursuant to the existing legislation. After the launch of the new system, when booking and checking in facilities, individual hirers and organisation hirers are required to declare and undertake that the user permit will not be transferred by any means. Hirers failing to do so may have contravened the Theft Ordinance (Cap. 210) which may result in criminal liability. The LCSD is stepping up the monitoring of unauthorised transfer and touting of recreation and sports venues, including closely monitoring and regularly searching social media platforms for information on venues and facility sessions of suspected touting cases, and working closely with the Police to take appropriate follow-up actions regarding any suspected cases of unauthorised transfer. The LCSD will continue to keep an eye on the effectiveness of the anti-touting measures, and will further enhance the SmartPLAY system and roll out more stringent administrative measures to combat touting when needed.

- (11) Since the launch of the new system in November last year, the LCSD still maintains services of booking counters (including DLSOs in the 18 districts) to cater for users who are not ready for the full adoption of the electronic platform. After the public become familiarised with the operation of the new system, booking counters will cease to provide booking services and be converted to services counters in phases to reduce the manpower required. The remaining staff will continue to provide other customer services for members of the public via services counters, such as providing guidance to them in using smart self-service stations, verifying and updating their eligibility for concession, processing check-in procedures of booked sessions for temporary users, and providing services relating to the standby arrangement for facilities. The LCSD will pay close attention to the general public's usage of the new system, and will conduct timely review of various arrangements in accordance with actual operational needs.
- (12) Following the launch of the core functions of Phase 1 in November 2023, the LCSD and the contractor are pressing ahead the development and testing of Phase 2. It is planned that the enhanced functions of Phase 2, including bookings by organisation, major events management, room/bay allotment for camps and campsites, fitness room management, water sports facilities management, as well as swimming lane booking and management, will be rolled out in the second half of 2024 progressively. The enhanced functions are part of the service contract for the development and maintenance of the entire system. The LCSD is unable to provide a breakdown of the expenditure for the functions of Phase 2.

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