

Executive Summary Direct Investigation Report

Repairs and Maintenance of Outdoor Recreational and Sports Facilities under Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Introduction

The Government has been devoting considerable resources in recent years to improve the design and utilisation of public play spaces. The quality, suitability and safety level of outdoor recreational and sports facilities have substantial impact on raising the living quality of the general public. As the management authority for a huge number of outdoor recreational and sports facilities, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (“LCSD”) has a duty to ensure that the facilities are in good condition and to arrange for their timely repairs and maintenance so that they can be used by the public safely for a sustained period.

Our Findings

2. We have the following comments and recommendations regarding the repairs and maintenance of outdoor recreational and sports facilities by LCSD:

(I) Lack of Specific Guidelines for Facilities Inspection and Inadequate Safety Awareness of Frontline Staff

3. LCSD has formulated departmental guidelines instructing frontline staff to inspect recreational and sports facilities periodically, drawn up procedures for reporting damage in facilities, and provided relevant on-the-job training to frontline staff on a regular basis to enhance their knowledge about the condition and inspection of the facilities. Nevertheless, our investigation found that some LCSD frontline staff had failed to report in a timely manner damage in recreational facilities and safety mats, and/or implement suitable temporary safety measures. This reflected a failure to fully understand the points to note during facilities inspections and the relevant safety requirements, as well as an inadequate awareness in reducing potential safety hazards among some LCSD staff.

4. In our view, LCSD should list out on the routine inspection form the facilities in a venue such that frontline staff can follow the list to inspect the facilities one by one during routine inspections and record the inspection results accordingly to obviate omissions. LCSD should also compile a technical practice guide for facilities inspections using wording intelligible to staff at all ranks and written from an execution perspective to guide the frontline staff. Objective or measurable standards and illustrations of the physical objects should be provided as far as possible with a view to

assisting frontline staff to accurately assess the damage spotted in facilities and evaluate the need to implement temporary safety measures. Furthermore, LCSD should step up training on facilities inspection to ensure understanding of the content of the practice guide by its staff so as to bolster their relevant knowledge and skills.

(II) Monitoring of Overall Repairs Procedures Inefficient

Improper Recording of Inspection Results and Reporting of Damage

5. The routine inspection forms and damage report forms for the facilities at different LCSD venues are filed and archived by individual District Leisure Services Offices to which a venue belongs, and the LCSD headquarters could not easily and systematically monitor the progress of the various facilities repair cases. In early 2023, LCSD started to develop a computer system that enables electronic recording of inspection results of and repairs for outdoor venues. Given the sheer number of facilities under LCSD management, we consider it imperative that the Department make use of smart technologies to consolidate and manage its facilities repair efforts. LCSD should follow up closely on the progress of developing the relevant computer system, and ensure that the relevant staff (including frontline venue staff, management staff and works staff responsible for arranging the repairs) can inspect in real time the records relating to facilities inspection and repairs, and follow up on the repair works in a timely manner.

Systematic Follow-up on Cases of Repairs Suspension Necessary

6. Depending on the actual operation of a venue or for some other reasons, LCSD's works staff may from time to time put on hold the repair works for facilities and continue to open the facilities in question to public use under safe circumstances. LCSD estimated that each year, there are as many as 300 to 400 such cases where repairs for damaged facilities is suspended, sometimes for as long as half a year. We opine that LCSD should compile a watch list for cases of repairs suspension (especially before full deployment of the aforementioned computer system) and devise a follow-up system for such cases to regularly inspect the damage in the facilities involved. This would not only strengthen facilities management for better safety risk control, but also help preclude omissions or delays in follow-up.

Ineffective Monitoring of Works Progress

7. The LCSD venue staff and LCSD's internal maintenance teams responsible for coordinating and handling repairs for outdoor recreational and sports facilities would monitor and follow up on the progress of repair works. Reminders or even warnings would be issued to contractors when delay in repairs is found. However, we noticed that warning letters were often issued only after the expected works completion date. In our view, once a works order is issued to the contractor, LCSD should monitor the commencement and progress of the repair works more effectively.

For instance, the Department can require the contractor to proactively report the different works procedures and works stages and set a last works date for the contractor in a timely manner. It should also clearly indicate to the contractor that decisive actions (such as cancelling the works order and reflecting the actual situation in the appraisal reports) would be taken in case the repairs are not completed on time, such that the possibility and magnitude of delay in the works can be minimised.

(III) Term Contract Arrangement Not Well-Considered and Not Conducive to Improving Efficiency and Quality of Repair Works

8. LCSD has outsourced the repairs and maintenance works for outdoor recreational and sports facilities and, by districts, awarded two term contracts to contractors. Nevertheless, the two term contracts were invariably awarded to the same contractor in recent years. We consider that if LCSD can engage more than one term contractor simultaneously, the impact on repair and maintenance works can be diminished when one of the contractors is unable to provide normal services. In this light, LCSD should conduct a major review of the term contract arrangement to explore a suitable alternative in appointing term contractors so as to raise the efficiency and quality of the Department’s repair works. It should also adopt options that allow more flexible arrangements in engaging term contractors to take up repairs for facilities. This can reduce the risk of over-reliance on one single contractor on the one hand and bring about greater flexibility in assigning repair works to contractors on the other. Healthy competition amongst contractors can also boost the quality and efficiency of their service.

(IV) Stronger Monitoring of Contractors Called For

9. Our investigation found that between 2017 and 2022, the actual time taken by LCSD to complete repairs of facilities was about two months, much longer than the time limit (14 to 60 days) LCSD has set for completing general repairs. Delay in repair works was rather serious between 2018 and 2022, during which around a quarter to half of the repair works involved contractors’ failure to complete the repairs by the expected completion date. We opine that LCSD needs to understand the specific reasons for delay in each repair case. It should consider adding to the relevant computer system a function to extract statistical data that are useful for examining and analysing the root causes of the problems, then formulate specific improvement measures to help the contractors to raise their efficiency and the Department to strengthen its monitoring of the contractors.

(V) Unclear Records on Performance Appraisals for Contractors and Guidance Should Be Provided to Works Staff

10. Since November 2019, LCSD has adopted the Development Bureau’s mechanism for monitoring approved public works contractors to grade the contractors’

performance and been submitting the appraisal reports to the Bureau. Yet, we found that in the past, LCSD had failed to give a full picture of the contractors' actual performance in the appraisal reports. For instance, the appraisal reports neither mentioned the number of repair works that had involved delay or the number of written warnings issued to the contractor during the appraisal period, nor provided clear, specific and substantial justification for the grade given. This would undermine the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism and related measures.

11. While LCSD had since 2021 made detailed records on the aspects of the contractors' performance that were considered "marginally satisfactory" or "poor", we opine that for the appraisal reports to always accurately reflect the contractors' performance, LCSD should provide the works staff responsible for evaluating contractors' performance with clear guidelines, including requiring them to provide objective data in the appraisals.

(VI) Consider Using Smart Technology to Facilitate Reporting of Facilities Damage by the Public

12. About 60 percent of LCSD's recreational and sports venues do not have on-site staff. Members of the public who discover damaged facilities can notify the venue in question during office hours or call the Government hotline 1823 for referral. We opine that LCSD can consider making use of smart technology that allows people to report damaged facilities for the Department's prompt follow-up actions, for example, by scanning the QR code attached to a recreational and sports facility or using instant communication software.

Our Recommendations

13. In light of our findings in this investigation, The Ombudsman has made the following 11 recommendations to LCSD:

- (1) consider compiling a technical practice guide on facilities inspection using wording intelligible to staff at all ranks to guide the frontline staff. Objective or measurable standards and illustrations of physical objects should be provided as far as practicable to assist them to judge accurately the damage spotted in facilities and assess the need to implement temporary safety measures;
- (2) instruct venue staff to list out on the routine inspection form the facilities in a venue, together with Chinese explanations, so that frontline staff of the venue can follow the list to inspect one by one the facilities during routine inspections and record the results accordingly to obviate omissions;

- (3) strengthen facilities inspection training for frontline staff to ensure their understanding of the relevant inspection guidelines and enhance their safety awareness in implementing temporary safety measures for damaged facilities or cordoning off those facilities. Refresher training courses should also be arranged for them regularly to solidify their relevant knowledge and skills;
- (4) follow up closely on the development of the computer system designed for facilities inspection and recording of repairs, and ensure that in the future, the relevant staff (including frontline venue staff, management staff and works staff responsible for arranging the repairs) can inspect in real time the records relating to facilities inspection and repairs, as well as follow up on the facilities repairs in a timely manner;
- (5) compile a watch list for cases of repairs suspension and draw up a follow-up system for such cases;
- (6) monitor more effectively the progress of facilities repairs and draw up guidelines to instruct frontline staff how to execute the relevant tasks;
- (7) revisit the current term contract arrangement, including to avoid awarding all term contracts to one single contractor at the same time, and in the long run explore options that allow more flexible arrangements for engaging term contractors to take up facilities repair works so as to avoid over-reliance on one single contractor and bring about greater flexibility in assigning repair works to contractors;
- (8) probe and analyse the reasons for works delay by contractors, collect data relating to works delay with a view to identifying the root causes and formulating specific improvement measures to help raise the efficiency of repairs by contractors and effectiveness of monitoring of contractors by LCSD;
- (9) consider installing a function in the relevant computer system to extract statistical data of reference value for research and analysis so as to strengthen monitoring of the overall repairs process;
- (10) provide clear appraisal guidelines to the works staff who evaluate contractors' performance such that the appraisal reports to be submitted to the Development Bureau can reflect contractors' performance more accurately and serve as reference for LCSD in contractor selection in the future; and

- (11) consider making use of smart technology to facilitate public report of damaged recreational and sports facilities under LCSD.

**Office of The Ombudsman
December 2023**

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