

Executive Summary

Direct Investigation Operation Report

Arrangements for Counter Services at Licensing Offices of Transport Department

Introduction

In recent years, the number of applications for direct issue of Hong Kong full driving licence without a test (“direct issue”) received by the Transport Department (“TD”) has surged, giving rise to excess demand for counter services to process these applications. Earlier, we noted that the media had from time to time reported that long queues were formed daily outside the Hong Kong Licensing Office before the opening hours, or even in the small hours, to obtain same-day queue tickets for “direct issue” counter services. The queues comprised staff members working for agents providing facilitation services. Some agents even recruited line standers, commonly known as “queueing gangs”, to obtain tickets. In addition to disorderly behaviour such as holding places and jumping queues, it was alleged that the “queueing gangs” had strained counter resources for commercial gains, causing serious disruption to applicants with genuine needs.

2. The Office considers that public services should be grounded on the principles of convenience, fairness and accessibility for all. The current-term Government has been actively promoting digital and electronic initiatives to enhance the quality and convenience of public services, and to meet the growing demands and expectations of society. However, disorderly and abusive situations have recurred in “direct issue” counter services at TD’s Licensing Office. As the problem persisted, users had to queue from the small hours or even overnight for a service that should have been convenient.

3. Our investigation revealed that the problem was not a coincidence, but rather stemmed from systemic deficiencies in TD’s queue management and abuse prevention mechanisms for counter services at the Licensing Offices, including their implementation, enforcement and crisis response. For example:

- queue ticket machine users could obtain queue tickets by inputting any identification document (“ID”) number, not necessarily their own, and no

application information was required;

- users could obtain more than one ticket even though they input the same ID number repeatedly;
- no verification of each service user's personal particulars against the queue ticket or appointment records by counter staff;
- holders of each ticket could submit up to 5 "direct issue" applications;
- latecomers who missed their turn can rejoin the service queue anytime within the same morning or afternoon session;
- counter resources for processing "direct issue" applications were highly concentrated in one Licensing Office;
- lack of timely response to the serious situation of wasted appointment slots or even abuse;
- requiring applicants to receive the results of "direct issue" in person at the Licensing Office, even though they have already submitted the originals of supporting documents; and
- lack of clarity in dissemination of information.

4. The above situations reflected TD's inadequate arrangements and failure to keep pace with the times, leading to the engrossing of scarce counter resources for commercial gain by agents who were familiar with TD's operations and relevant loopholes. Ordinary applicants could not access services fairly and conveniently due to limited resources. Furthermore, "direct issue" applicants are generally visitors from overseas or the Chinese Mainland. While the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR") has prided itself on the openness, simplicity and efficiency of its public administration, the problem of "queueing gangs" and the previous arrangements for "direct issue" fall far short of these values, which might give applicants a negative impression.

5. TD had introduced countermeasures to enhance the queue ticketing system for "direct issue" and prevent misuse, and had sought additional resources for system

upgrades. Yet, no immediate or significant results were achieved. Although the queue ticketing problem and misuse showed no signs of abating, TD did not take other effective measures at an early stage. It was not until August 2025 that TD began to roll out more targeted improvement measures, including requiring agents obtaining same-day queue tickets to also input the applicant's personal particulars, and collaborating with Chinese Mainland authorities for driving licensing to verify the personal particulars of those making appointments. Subsequently, TD introduced the "Online Same-day Queue Ticket" arrangement in January 2026 to replace the on-site ticketing arrangement, which immediately eliminated the long-standing queues outside the Licensing Office. We are pleased to note the improved situation and acknowledge the progress. Yet, the actual operation of the "Online Same-day Queue Ticket" arrangement continued to aggrieve some members of the public, with complaints lodged with us. In hindsight, the above circumstances call into question whether TD can adopt a more people-oriented approach at an early stage in formulating and implementing policies and specific arrangements, thereby fully understanding the actual needs and difficulties faced by service users. TD also needs to improve its supervisory system, performance management, crisis response capability and the launch of improvement measures.

6. TD asserted that with the full implementation of the online booking system introduced for "direct issue" counter services in mid-March 2026 and an increase in appointment quotas, the associated concerns and problems at the Licensing Office have largely ceased. However, we consider these problems and the phenomenon of "queueing gangs" to have exposed shortcomings and loopholes in TD's original counter services and queue management, which allowed "queueing gangs" and certain people to take advantage of and abuse public resources and services. At present, other types of counter services are operating relatively smoothly without similar chaos. Yet, should the demand for other services suddenly surge in future, similar chaos may occur again. We, therefore, recommend that TD proactively consider the "direct issue" incident as a catalyst for review and rethinking of the overall arrangements for counter services, plugging the identified loopholes and fine-tuning the arrangements to continuously improve public administration.

7. We also noted that TD had announced plans to fully implement the online booking system for "direct issue" counter services in the fourth quarter of 2025, arrange more Licensing Offices for such counter services and increase the appointment quotas. Ultimately, these measures were deferred until mid-March 2026. We recommend that TD continue to monitor the actual effectiveness of the above measures and make

adjustments where necessary. It should also proactively plan and roll out long-term enhancements to prevent misuse and expedite the approval process, thereby ensuring that members of the public and visitors to Hong Kong can receive adequate services fairly and conveniently within a reasonable time frame, on a par with acceptable standards of public services and social expectations.

8. Consolidating our findings, we have the following observations and comments regarding the arrangements for counter services provided by TD's Licensing Offices.

Our Findings

(I) Enforcement of Queue Ticketing Conditions

9. TD has drawn up conditions of use for the queue ticketing system, which are intended to facilitate its fair and smooth operation and to prevent abuse. However, we find that TD had not enforced some of these conditions stringently, resulting in frequent abuse and irregularities.

Limit of One Ticket per Person

10. The Licensing Office's conditions of use stipulate that "Each person can take one queue ticket only. The ticket is NOT transferrable to another person" and "Possessing more than one ticket at a time would contravene the conditions of use and render all tickets void." Given the excess demand for counter service, setting a limit of one ticket per person can ensure a fairer allocation of limited counter resources to users in need and prevent abuse. Yet, TD had not strictly enforced the above conditions in practice. Before the system upgrade in May 2025, the queue ticketing system for "direct issue" counter services could not detect duplicate ID numbers. In other words, users could input the same ID number repeatedly to obtain more tickets for the same time slot.

11. Our spot checks on "direct issue" records confirmed that there were holders of multiple queue tickets. Some ID numbers appeared more than once within the same time slot, including one appearing 7 times in a single day, indicating that a person with the same ID number obtained multiple tickets. We find holders of multiple tickets on each of the 10 working days selected for spot checks, with more than 20% of the "direct issue" queue tickets in the relevant time slots concentrated in the hands of holders of

multiple tickets. The above shows that the non-compliance was extensive.

12. Our spot checks also revealed that an agent used 6 tickets to submit a total of 30 “direct issue” applications over the counter within one day, 3 times the upper limit of 10 applications per person per day. Including this person, 7 agents submitted 15 to 30 “direct issue” applications each, or 135 in aggregate, representing 37.5% of a total of 360 received via queue tickets on the same day. In other words, these 7 agents alone accounted for nearly 40% of “direct issue” applications submitted via the Licensing Office’s ticket-based counter services that day.

13. TD explained that after consulting the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data, it had drawn up the arrangements in accordance with the principle of data minimisation, under which users are required to input the first 4 digits of the ID number and present the original ID for on-site verification where necessary. We recognise that the collection of personal data should comply with the principles of protecting personal privacy. However, TD should prevent abuse of tickets despite the minimum collection of personal data. Otherwise, it would fail to balance competing interests. Our findings above precisely reflect that the original arrangements could not effectively prevent abuse. TD should explore effective measures to ensure that only 1 ticket can be obtained per ID number for each time slot.

Tickets Are Non-transferable

14. The conditions of use stipulate that “Queuers must be the counter service users... The ticket is NOT transferable to another person”, and “(TD) staff may ask queuers to present their original identification documents for verification and record purposes.” Yet, we find that TD had not strictly enforced the above conditions. Generally, Licensing Office staff would not ask queuers of “direct issue” tickets to present their ID for verification. Without monitoring, “queueing gangs” recruited for obtaining same-day queue tickets emerged. Our site inspections at the Hong Kong Licensing Office and media reports confirmed this observation. During two site inspections, our officers saw a group of elderly persons queue for “direct issue” tickets, some of them appearing in both morning and afternoon sessions of the same day. Their behaviour smacked of “queueing gangs”.

Verification of Information at the Counter

15. The conditions of use also stipulate that the ID of the counter service user must

match the ID number printed on the queue ticket. TD stressed that counter staff will check the ID number printed on the ticket against the ID of the applicant or agent specified on the application form. However, we find that an agent used 3 tickets to submit 20 “direct issue” applications over the counter within one day, exceeding the limit of 5 applications per ticket. The incident reflects a lack of stringent verification by counter staff to ensure compliance with the conditions of use. Records also show that it was by no means an isolated case.

16. Given that the various conditions of use were not properly enforced, agents could easily exploit the loopholes by recruiting “queueing gangs” to obtain “direct issue” queue tickets, which were then handed over to the agents. These agents could profit from using multiple tickets to submit “direct issue” applications over the counter, or by touting their facilitation services after obtaining the tickets. Applicants with genuine needs had no option but to set off early in the morning to compete with the “queueing gangs” at the Licensing Office, or to pay for facilitation services.

17. Since 16 March 2026, the online booking system has been fully implemented for “direct issue” counter services (i.e. no more distribution of same-day queue tickets). However, the on-site queue ticketing system is still in place for other driving licensing-related counter services, with the possibility of extending it to vehicle licensing-related services in future. We, therefore, recommend that TD address the operational issues identified above. It should promptly review the current inadequacies in enforcing the queueing systems and conditions for counter services, step up supervision and introduce corresponding improvement measures.

(II) Arrangements under Queue Ticketing System for Counter Services

18. We also find that some arrangements under the queue ticketing system at the Licensing Offices are unreasonable, allowing certain people to exploit the loopholes at the expense of applicants with genuine needs.

No New Ticket Required for Latecomers

19. Ticket holders need not stay and wait at the Licensing Offices. Instead, they can return to use counter service anytime between their number being called and the end of the same morning or afternoon session. TD explained that allowing latecomers to use counter service is intended to enhance service flexibility and convenience. Overall, it can optimise the use of counter resources.

20. However, we consider this practice questionable. Allowing ticket holders who are significantly late to use counter service would essentially facilitate agents' touting for business with the tickets obtained. They can return to the Licensing Office to use the counter service only after securing customers, making the most of the upper limit of 5 applications per ticket for maximum profits. During site inspections, our officers observed that some persons at the front of the queue, suspected of being "queueing gangs", left the venue immediately without using the "direct issue" tickets they just obtained. This practice not only causes unfairness and inconvenience to obedient ticket holders, who would find it difficult to estimate the actual waiting time, but also disrupts the order and progress of the queue. Nor do we agree that this practice can optimise the use of counter resources. If many ticket holders do not use counter services in the sequence of their ticket numbers, the Licensing Office will be unable to forecast and evenly distribute the crowd, resulting in chaos and inefficient use of resources.

21. We recommend that TD review and improve its current practice to ensure fairness and reasonableness while taking into account the convenience of service users, such as imposing commonly accepted restrictions on latecomers. TD can also consider displaying the ticket numbers of returned users on information screens and mobile applications, so that those still waiting can more accurately track the number-calling status and estimated waiting time.

Maximum of Five "Direct Issue" Applications Each Time

22. According to the arrangements at the Licensing Offices, counter service users can submit a maximum of 5 applications under a major type each time or with each same-day queue ticket. TD explained that some applicants have a genuine need to authorise an agent or submit several applications at the same time. For example, when transferring vehicle ownership, the new and previous owners may submit several related applications for "retention of vehicle registration mark", "transfer of ownership", "assignment of vehicle registration mark" and "vehicle licence renewal" at the same time; corporate owners may renew the licences for multiple vehicles under their name in one go. TD stated that it has taken into account the public's needs and the overall efficiency of counter services. Given that staff need not repeatedly verify the same set of documents for related applications, this practice can improve the efficiency of counter services.

23. We consider the above examples to have merely illustrated that vehicle owners may need to submit several related applications for vehicle licensing at the same time, but they are insufficient to justify setting a limit of 5 “direct issue” applications with each same-day queue ticket. This is because “direct issue” applicants typically submit only 1 application for themselves; even when submitting applications for their relatives or friends, multiple applications are generally not involved. Moreover, as each “direct issue” application is independent, staff rarely need to verify the same set of documents repeatedly for different applications. We cannot see how an ordinary person has a genuine need to submit multiple “direct issue” applications, or how service efficiency would be improved by this practice. Allowing the submission of multiple “direct issue” applications each time essentially benefits only agents who are handling multiple applications.

24. It was too lenient on the part of TD to set a uniform limit of 5 applications each time for all types of licensing applications (namely, vehicle licensing, general driving licensing and “direct issue” applications). Rather than providing convenience for applicants, it facilitated engrossing of counter resources by agents for commercial gain, which was undesirable. It was also unfair to ordinary individual applicants with just 1 application because they had to join the same queue with agents who were handling numerous applications, resulting in significantly longer waiting time. We are pleased to note that since the online booking system has been fully implemented for “direct issue”, only 1 application is allowed per appointment. We recommend that TD specify the proper limits of applications for different types of licensing services separately, taking into account the nature of service and practical needs. Since TD’s relevant review is already underway, we urge TD to complete this review as soon as possible and make the corresponding adjustments.

Application Documents Not Ready When Obtaining Ticket

25. According to TD’s queueing conditions for counter services, queuers are not allowed to wait in line without having their application documents ready, to pass documents around while waiting, or to add more applications. We understand that these conditions are intended to prevent agents from arranging for others to tout for business during the waiting time, and then passing the new applications to agents in line for processing at the counter.

26. Subsequently, TD implemented the queue ticketing system for driving licensing services to replace the physical queue, but it has not incorporated similar conditions into

the system, such as requiring queuers to have the applicant's details ready in advance or forbidding the addition of new applicants after obtaining a ticket. Consequently, agents can leave the premises of Licensing Offices to tout for business after obtaining tickets. After finding a new applicant, they can even take their time to complete the application form and return to the queue to submit it. It is arguable that it is easier and more convenient for agents to tout for business on-site and provide facilitation services for driving licensing applications now than under the former queueing system. However, TD has not taken effective countermeasures at an early stage to address the phenomenon of touting and "queueing gangs". We recommend that TD learn from this experience and improve its response capability.

(III) Allocation of Counter Resources

Failing to Allocate Service Quotas Flexibly among Licensing Offices

27. From 2021 to 2025, the number of "direct issue" applications received by TD surged from more than 27,000 to 84,500 each year. All appointment slots for "direct issue" counter services were instantly booked once released, and same-day queue tickets continued to be fully distributed. Besides, the media reported at times on a large crowd waiting outside the Hong Kong Licensing Office early in the morning to obtain "direct issue" queue tickets, and the emergence of "queueing gangs". Coupled with the fact that its frontline staff were busy maintaining order in the face of an early crowd every day, TD should be aware of the keen demand for "direct issue" counter services.

28. However, the quota of "direct issue" counter services available at the Hong Kong Licensing Office was not increased accordingly, leading to a shortage of supply. We understand that TD might not be able to deploy significantly more staff and counters with little lead time due to resource constraints, but it should have allocated existing resources more effectively to meet the latest demand for licensing services as far as possible. Since mid-2024, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin Licensing Offices have had unused quotas of same-day queue tickets for driving licensing-related counter services. Had TD flexibly redeployed staff and resources at an early stage to extend the "direct issue" counter services to these two Licensing Offices, this would have served to divert and alleviate the pressure.

Imbalanced Distribution between Ticket and Appointment-based Counter Services

29. We find an imbalanced distribution between ticket and appointment-based

counter services for “direct issue” applications. Prior to the implementation of the “Online Same-day Queue Ticket” arrangement, the Hong Kong Licensing Office provided 100 appointment slots and distributed 140 same-day queue tickets on-site for “direct issue” counter services each working day. Given that a maximum of 5 applications could be submitted per ticket, the “direct issue” applications received via same-day tickets could reach up to 700 per day. However, as only 1 application could be submitted per appointment, the applications received via appointments were limited to a maximum of 100 per day. During the period selected for spot checks, TD received an average of fewer than 20 appointment-based “direct issue” applications per day, against an average of 300 ticket-based applications.

30. As shown above, TD potentially and actually allocated far more counter resources to process ticket-based than appointment-based “direct issue” applications. Since appointment slots were limited and always fully booked, some applicants resorted to queueing in person for same-day queue tickets, exacerbating the problem. The more severe the queueing problem became, the more applicants were driven to use the facilitation services of agents, causing distortion of the orderly operations of the Licensing Office. We consider that TD should have allocated more counters for appointment-based applications at an early stage, allowing more applicants to access counter services directly to ensure fairness. On the other hand, it would have alleviated the pressure caused by a large crowd queueing at the Licensing Office for same-day queue tickets. We recommend that TD review the allocation of ticket and appointment-based counter services for various types of licensing applications and make proper adjustments.

(IV) Abuse of On-line Booking System for “Direct Issue” Applications

31. Our spot checks reveal serious abuse of the booking system for “direct issue” counter services. Duplicate bookings were found on each of the 10 working days selected for spot checks. On 7 of those days, more than 40% of the appointment slots were taken up by duplicate bookings each day, including a person using the same personal particulars to book 18 slots on the same day. Appointment slots were taken up by many bookings which were duplicate or made with erroneous or dubious information, while most of these persons would not turn up and use the service. Consequently, a large number of scarce slots for “direct issue” counter services were wasted every day, as evidenced by the persistently high no-show rates in recent years.

32. TD stated that the Licensing Office would flexibly redeploy counters. When

there were no queues, staff at the appointment-based counter would assist in processing “direct issue” applications submitted with same-day queue tickets. Nevertheless, we consider it highly undesirable that the booking system continues to be abused, leading to a large number of wasted slots. Genuine applicants were deprived of the opportunity to access services conveniently without using an agent. At the time, public demand for the “direct issue” counter services remained high and outstripped supply, making it more lucrative to queue and complete the process on behalf of applicants. We cannot rule out that some people deliberately wasted the appointment slots for “direct issue” services. Applicants who were unable to secure appointments naturally had to resort to the facilitation services of agents. TD has a responsibility to take timely measures to curb such misuse.

33. Although TD had measures in place to combat or prevent abusive bookings before August 2025, these measures were ineffective. TD explained that the booking system is unable to screen the data inputted by applicants during the booking process, because their IDs are issued by different countries or regions with diverse number formats. However, even though the system cannot automatically screen the ID numbers due to diverse formats, it should not be too difficult to configure it to reject bookings with completely identical personal particulars, which would suffice to block a significant number of abusive bookings.

34. TD stipulates that applicants must provide accurate information identical to that on their ID and driving licence at the time of booking. If they provide incomplete or erroneous information or make a duplicate booking, their appointment will be cancelled. However, we find that TD has not strictly enforced these conditions, allowing persons who have made duplicate bookings or inputted incorrect information to use counter service. TD explained that in practice, if it can be verified that the person making the booking is the applicant, it will generally exercise discretion to allow the applicant to use counter service even if the application and booking details are not fully matched. We consider it understandable to give leeway to applicants with genuine needs and justification. However, as the “direct issue” service has long been plagued by abusive bookings, dubious cases and “queueing gangs”, TD should have handled it more stringently to curb misuse.

35. TD also stated that it conducts regular analysis of appointment utilisation and no-show rates, and sends reminders to persons with appointments to reduce no-shows; it has also taken no-show rates into account and increased appointment slots accordingly. We are pleased to note that TD is paying attention to the no-show rates

of appointment-based counter services. However, our investigation revealed that prior to the full implementation of the online booking system for “direct issue” counter services, its high no-show rates were primarily due to slots being taken up and wasted by many duplicate and suspicious bookings, reflecting that the booking system at the time was unable to effectively prevent abuse. As this booking system is still in use for other licensing counter services, TD should review it and consider extending the improvement measures for “direct issue” services (i.e. verifying each applicant’s details before confirming a booking) to other counter services. It should also explore how to further reduce no-show rates.

(V) *Approval Process for “Direct Issue” Applications*

36. In the past, “direct issue” applicants or their agents were generally required to visit the Licensing Office twice to complete the process. Subsequently, some applicants whose applications were approved could complete the process and collect driving licences on the same day, but these cases were very much in the minority. It was not until TD fully implemented the online booking system and increased staffing that eligible “direct issue” applicants who had submitted all required information could generally complete the process and collect driving licences on the same day.

37. TD explained that it needs to scrutinise “direct issue” applications carefully. To ensure that applicants meet statutory requirements and provide accurate information, applicants are required to present the originals of various supporting documents for verification on the spot. Hence, TD considers that applications are best submitted in person over the counter. While acknowledging TD’s need for scrutinising applications carefully, we believe there is scope to streamline the approval process. If applicants have provided all required documents at the time of submitting an application, there is no need for them to return to the Licensing Office to collect the results. If they can receive their driving licence by post, they will not need to stay and wait on-site or visit the Licensing Office again.

38. TD indicated that it will actively explore the use of technologies, including artificial intelligence and optical character recognition, to verify the supporting documents for “direct issue” applications. It has already submitted proposals and sought resources from relevant authorities, with the aim of launching a new online platform in 2028. We recommend that in addition to applying artificial intelligence, TD also consider adopting other measures to further enhance its capacity to process “direct issue” applications, thereby minimising approval time and applicants’ waiting

time.

39. Chinese Mainland authorities have long been actively optimising administrative services, promoting the principle of “one-stop service” for applicants to complete all formalities with “no more than one visit”. We consider the model worth emulating by all departments of the HKSAR Government. Departments should integrate workflows, make effective use of digital solutions, and continuously improve services. In doing so, they can raise the efficiency of public administration while maximising convenience, thereby enhancing the public’s sense of happiness and fulfilment.

(VI) Unclear Dissemination of Information

40. TD had piloted a preliminary vetting service for “direct issue” applications submitted via email, which offers many advantages for general applicants. Firstly, applicants with preliminary approval needed only to visit the Licensing Office once to complete the process and receive a driving licence. Secondly, the processing time was significantly shortened as results were generally available within 10 working days after submitting the application form via email for preliminary vetting. Moreover, applicants with preliminary approval could obtain the queue tickets for general driving licensing-related counter services to complete the process, which was relatively convenient and easier.

41. We find that TD’s dissemination of information on preliminary vetting via email was unclear. Apart from a note in small print at the bottom of the “direct issue” application form’s front page, other common and widely used channels (such as TD’s website and the 1823 website) made no mention of the service, which might have prevented members of the public from being fairly informed. Some persons (such as agents) might know the preliminary vetting service from experience, while general applicants are deprived of the opportunity to use it due to a lack of awareness. The situation effectively resulted in reserving the service for those familiar with TD’s operations, which is not ideal. We recommend that TD pay attention to dissemination of sufficient and clear information on new services or arrangements.

(VII) Inconvenient Arrangements for Online Same-day Tickets

42. Between 12 January and 16 March 2026, TD implemented the “Online Same-day Queue Ticket” arrangement for “direct issue” counter services. Applicants could obtain online same-day tickets via its website instead of a paper ticket on-site.

However, we consider the overall arrangement not user-friendly.

43. Due to the large number of applicants, they must log into the system before 7 am for random allocation of a queue position and registration for an online same-day ticket in sequence. Applicants whose allocated position was not near the front of the queue might need to get up early repeatedly and try again. Furthermore, since the system interface did not display one's queue position, applicants were unable to assess their chance of obtaining a ticket. As a result, some queuers whose positions far exceeded the daily quota of 300 tickets still wasted their time waiting online, even though they had no chance of obtaining a ticket. Applicants who successfully obtained a ticket must attend the Licensing Office within the designated time slot on the same day to submit an application. As it was impossible to predict whether a ticket could be obtained or the time slot designated, applicants had to hastily alter their schedules after obtaining a ticket, causing inconvenience and stress. We have received complaints about the arrangement for causing serious disruption to daily lives. We consider it unsatisfactory and lacking thorough consideration from the perspective of applicants. Although the arrangement has been cancelled, the issues raised above warrant TD's attention and reflection. We recommend that TD adopt a more people-oriented approach when implementing new services or arrangements in future, and consider matters more carefully from various perspectives.

(VIII) Failing to Respond Promptly to Queue Ticketing Problems Associated with "Direct Issue" Service

44. The excess demand for "direct issue" counter services and the queueing situation not only prolonged the public's wait for service, but also gave rise to "queueing gangs", seriously disrupting normal service operations and the ordinary submission of applications. Applicants trying to make an application themselves faced enormous difficulties, and some of them resorted to paying agents for the facilitation services. After the ordeal of "direct issue" services, they would hardly agree that openness, simplicity and efficiency are the core values of public administration in HKSAR.

45. There have been signs of the above anomalies long ago. TD should have identified the obvious loopholes in the booking and queue ticketing systems for "direct issue" services at an early stage and taken effective remedial action. Firstly, the keen demand for "direct issue" counter services was evident from the surge of applications in recent years, with its same-day queue tickets consistently utilised at 100% and all appointment slots fully booked. Secondly, the daily crowds and "queueing gangs"

outside the Hong Kong Licensing Office should have alerted TD to the seriousness of the problem. Meanwhile, the fact that many people who had successfully booked the sought-after “direct issue” counter services did not turn up further indicated that the situation was far from normal.

46. TD stated that early in 2023, it had noted changes in the demand for “direct issue” services and the queueing situation. Consequently, it began preparations to optimise the online booking system and the workflow for “direct issue” applications; before the completion of system upgrades, it improved the queue ticketing system and on-site queue management, including adjusting the quota of counter services in phases. We recognise TD’s preparations and resource allocation. However, queueing issues and misuse of “direct issue” services had persisted since the queue ticketing system was implemented in March 2024, and TD’s response at that time did not bring about any timely and significant improvement. For example, the measures introduced between June 2024 and early 2025 focused primarily on on-site order management rather than getting to the root of the problem. Consequently, the “queueing gangs” and misuse escalated instead of disappearing. It was only after the problem had persisted for over a year that TD took more decisive action. Overall, the circumstances reflect TD’s failure to introduce effective and timely solutions in the face of anomalies despite its attempts to make improvements.

47. As the current-term Government is committed to promoting smart city and digital initiatives, we welcome TD’s efforts in launching online and e-licensing services. Queueing issues associated with “direct issue” service highlight that the digitalisation of licensing services is still lagging behind. We urge TD to review and implement relevant improvement measures as soon as possible to meet public expectations, and to continue actively promoting online and e-licensing services to further enhance service efficiency and convenience.

(IX) Waiting Time Survey Failing to Reflect Actual Situation

48. TD’s survey calculates waiting times for counter services from when users join the queue at the Licensing Office. The same principle is adopted after implementation of the queue ticketing system for driving licensing services. However, this methodology is unsuitable for ticket-based counter services, as it excludes the time counter service users spend on waiting to obtain same-day queue tickets and to be called. These two periods form part of the actual waiting time for counter services, which often better reflect counter efficiency and the number of people waiting. The actual situation

cannot be reflected without taking these periods into account. We recommend that TD draw up separate methods for calculating the waiting times of queue-based and ticket-based counter services, and consider setting performance pledges for waiting times separately.

49. For many years, TD's waiting time survey for counter services has covered only 6 types of driving licensing and vehicle licensing applications. We recommend that TD regularly review and update the types of licensing services covered, and consider including major or special events of public concern or significant impact on counter services (such as "direct issue") within the scope of the survey to monitor service quality effectively.

Recommendations

50. In the light of the above, The Ombudsman recommends that TD:

Queue Ticketing System for Counter Services

- (1) enhance the queue ticketing system for general driving licensing services, with a built-in mechanism to identify duplicate ID numbers;
- (2) explore further measures to prevent users from obtaining multiple queue tickets;
- (3) consider introducing effective supervisory measures requiring counter staff to verify that the ID number of each user matches the applicant's or agent's ID printed on the queue ticket, such as inputting the data into the computer system for on-the-spot verification and record-keeping before providing counter services;
- (4) provide regular staff training to ensure that Licensing Office staff at all levels are familiar with and strictly enforce the conditions of use and requirements for counter services;
- (5) continue to supervise frontline staff and security personnel to ensure the strict enforcement of the above identity verification measures;

- (6) consider extending the requirement to input all applicants' ID numbers when obtaining same-day queue tickets to other counter services;
- (7) further review the current queueing systems and conditions for counter services at the Licensing Offices to identify any other areas of inadequate enforcement;
- (8) consider optimising the information displayed on information screens and mobile applications by including the ticket numbers of returned users, so that those still waiting can more accurately track the number-calling status and estimated waiting time;
- (9) based on the latest situation of queue ticketing for driving licensing-related counter services, consider revising the practice of allowing ticket holders who are significantly late to rejoin the queue anytime, such as setting a reasonable time limit for rejoining the queue;

Arrangements for Online and Telephone Booking

- (10) consider extending the improvement measure for "direct issue" service (i.e. verifying the applicant's details before confirming a booking) to other counter services to reduce wasted appointment slots due to accidental or erroneous bookings;
- (11) consider implementing further measures to reduce no-shows for counter services, such as suspending users with repeated no-shows from making bookings for a period of time to prevent counter resources from being wasted;

Distribution of Quotas

- (12) continuously review the ratio of appointment-based to ticket or queue-based counter services for various licensing applications, and increase appointment slots as far as possible to encourage more users to make appointments instead of waiting on-site;
- (13) continue to regularly review the latest demand for various counter services and adjust the distribution of quotas for different counter services as

required;

Operations of Licensing Offices and Service Counters

- (14) promptly complete the review of the maximum number of vehicle licensing and driving licensing-related applications allowed to be submitted over the counter each time, and implement the relevant arrangements;
- (15) if queue tickets are distributed separately for a counter service in future, independently assess the maximum number of applications allowed to be submitted each time;
- (16) conduct a timely review of the surprise inspections introduced since May 2025 to improve order on-site, continue to report to management on their implementation and effectiveness, and further strengthen staff supervision where necessary;

Improvement Measures for “Direct Issue” Service

- (17) implement the long-term improvement measures announced in August 2025 as soon as possible, and expedite the use of artificial intelligence technology to assist in processing “direct issue” applications;
- (18) further to recommendation (17), expedite research into the use of artificial intelligence technology in processing other types of licensing applications, with a view to enhancing overall service efficiency;
- (19) continuously review the application and approval procedures for “direct issue”, with a view to further simplifying the application process and shortening the time required for approval;
- (20) closely monitor the full implementation of the online booking system for “direct issue” counter services, and stay alert for any misuse via automated programs or other suspicious activities; where necessary, consider seeking advice from the Digital Policy Office to further strengthen system security;

Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

- (21) remind staff at all levels to be more sensitive to potential irregularities and maintain a high level of vigilance, rigorously guarding against the misuse of public resources and services;
- (22) continuously monitor and review the utilisation rates of different types of licensing services provided by the Licensing Offices and counters;
- (23) regularly review the existing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting problems or anomalies to ensure timely escalation to senior management for discussion;
- (24) take swift and effective action in response to any problems or anomalies identified;

Waiting Time Survey

- (25) review the methodology for calculating waiting times, and consider covering the time spent on waiting to obtain same-day queue tickets, so as to reflect the actual time required for counter services and for completing applications from the user's perspective;
- (26) consider establishing performance pledges regarding waiting times for different types of counter services;
- (27) regularly review and update the items covered in the waiting time survey to ensure more comprehensive monitoring of services;

Overall Management

- (28) adopt a more people-oriented approach to the approval process in future, with a view to providing more user-friendly and convenient arrangements;
- (29) improve the dissemination of information on new arrangements to be piloted in future;
- (30) formulate and announce future improvement measures with more

comprehensive and thorough consideration to avoid any further deferral in implementation;

- (31) draw lessons from the “Online Same-day Queue Ticket” arrangement; if new measures cannot be implemented as scheduled, plan and announce temporary or transitional measures in advance to keep the public informed;
- (32) continue to actively promote online and e-licensing services; and
- (33) strengthen performance management to continuously enhance service quality and improve user experience.

Office of The Ombudsman

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