

LCQ14: Mechanism for regulating betting and lottery business

\*\*\*\*\*

Following is a question by the Hon Alan Leong and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (October 17):

Question:

Starting from the current racing season, the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) allows racehorse owners to bring their underage family members to racecourses on racedays to watch horse racing. Regarding the mechanism for regulating the betting on horse races, soccer matches and the lottery business, will the Government inform this Council whether:

(a) the HKJC has applied to the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA) for varying the conditions of the horse race betting licence (the licence) prior to implementing the above measure; if it has, of the approval date and justifications given by SHA; if it has not, the reasons for that;

(b) SHA has considered amending the conditions of the licence and the related Code of Practice (the Code) with regard to allowing access of underage persons to racecourses; if he has, of the progress and details of the amendment exercise; if not, the reasons for that, and

(c) SHA has reviewed the mechanism for regulating the betting on horse races, soccer matches and the lottery business, and made efforts to enhance the transparency of the mechanism, including making public the documents and minutes of the meetings of the Betting and Lotteries Committee, and convening public hearings when dealing with matters involving amendments to the licensing conditions or the Code or licence renewal; if he has, of the progress and details of the review; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) has not applied to the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA) for varying the licensing conditions prior to implementing the new arrangement. According to the information provided by HKJC to the Government, the new arrangement is in response to the request from the horse owners, and is applicable only to day meetings at the Sha Tin racecourse and under-aged family members brought along by the horse owners. The new arrangement of the HKJC has not violated any licensing conditions. In order to comply with the relevant licensing conditions - that is - not to accept

bets from under-aged persons and not to accept bets in any premises to which under-aged persons are permitted to have access, access for the under-aged persons to the racecourse is confined to the specified non-betting areas. The HKJC has already put in place various measures and arrangements (including an increase in manpower) to ensure clear separation of such areas from the betting halls, and to strictly guard against entrance of the under-aged persons to the betting halls.

(b) The Government has always strictly abided by the policy of not allowing under-aged persons to participate in gambling. We will closely monitor the implementation of the new arrangement, and will request the HKJC to provide information on the implementation to the Betting and Lotteries Commission ("BLC"), so that the BLC can advise the Government on the licensing conditions and/or the code of practice if necessary.

(c) The function of the BLC is to advise SHA on the regulation of the conduct of horse race betting, football betting and lotteries in accordance with the provisions of the Betting Duty Ordinance, for SHA to make decisions. The Government and the BLC are of the view that the current meeting arrangements are appropriate, and have no plans to make substantial changes.

Ends/Wednesday, October 17, 2007