

LCQ11: Regulation of football betting

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Shing-chi and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

Regarding the regulation of football betting after its authorisation, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) whether they know the current number of off-course betting branches operated by the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) in which television sets have been installed for live telecast of football matches; whether matches of the 2010 World Cup or other football matches will be telecast live in HKJC betting branches; if so, how HKJC ensures that young people who stand outside such branches watching the matches will not be influenced by gambling information;

(b) whether they know if HKJC will consider making reference to the practice adopted at the betting branch in Yat Tung Shopping Centre of Tung Chung and covering all external walls of its betting branches with posters, or requiring all television sets installed in its betting branches to be located at such places where on-lookers will not be able to watch the telecast from outside the branches, so as to avoid young people from gaining access to gambling information while watching football matches outside betting branches;

(c) whether they know the number of additional pari-mutuel betting and bet types introduced by HKJC for the 2010 World Cup as compared with those of the 2006 World Cup; of the estimated proceeds to be generated from such new bet types; and whether the Government has examined how HKJC can be effectively regulated so that it will not continue to introduce new pari-mutuel betting and bet types in an attempt to boost betting turnover;

(d) of the respective amounts of funding earmarked by the Ping Wo Fund for launching front-line publicity and enhancing gambling counselling services during the 2010 World Cup, so as to alleviate the adverse effects of football betting;

(e) what measures the Government has to avoid mingling of football betting information by the media with world football news which is popular with young people, so that newspaper sports columns will not turn into football betting pages; and

(f) given that quite a number of additional bet types have been introduced by HKJC for football betting, whether prior approval has been sought from the Government in this regard; what measures the Government has to deter gambling; and how the Betting and Lotteries Commission will tackle the problem of rampant gambling?

Reply:

President,

(a) and (b) All 105 off-course betting branches (OCBBs) operated by the Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) are installed with TV sets which can broadcast live non-World Cup football matches. Among the 105 OCBBs, 47 of them are installed with TV facilities that are able to broadcast live 2010 World Cup football matches.

HKJC has stringent measures to prohibit persons below 18 from entering its OCBBs. The measures include:

(i) all entrances/exits of OCBBs are manned by full time and trained security guards to ensure all persons entering OCBBs are above 18. In case of doubt, security guards would conduct identity card checks;

(ii) customer service staff would patrol inside OCBBs to prevent any persons below 18 from entering; and

(iii) staff of the ticket sales counters are trained not to accept bets from persons below 18 or allow them to collect prize money.

The TV sets in OCBBs are installed some distance away from the entrances/exits or external walls. Security guards at OCBBs would also urge underage persons who gather or loiter outside OCBBs to leave. There is no imminent need to cover the external walls of all OCBBs for the time being.

(c) and (f) The number of bet types available for the 2010 World Cup has increased by three as compared with that for the 2006 World Cup. HKJC considers it difficult to

forecast the proceeds to be generated from the new bet types at this stage.

In accordance with Section 6I of the Betting Duty Ordinance (Cap 108), a licence for football betting is issued by the Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA) to HKJC for conducting football betting. While the licensing conditions do not restrict the bet types of football betting, HKJC is required to formulate and promulgate rules for regulating the general procedures of football betting for submission to SHA, and inform SHA of any significant amendments to the rules, including those arising from the introduction of new bet types. The Betting and Lotteries Commission (BLC) was set up to advise the Government on the monitoring of betting activities and HKJC's compliance with the licensing conditions. BLC can request HKJC to give further elaboration on bet types. Regarding measures to deter gambling atmosphere, the Administration will continue to work jointly with the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee (PWFAC) to enhance promotion and education efforts in order to minimise the impact of gambling on the public.

(d) Around \$3 million of the Ping Wo Fund would be spent in 2010 to step up publicity and education efforts during the World Cup. The series of activities includes new television announcements in the public interest on the negative impact of gambling, television programmes, publicity efforts through the Internet, inter-school football matches and carnival. These programmes aim to enhance public awareness of the negative impact of excessive gambling, as well as introduce ways to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems.

In addition, the total annual allocation of the Ping Wo Fund for the four counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers has increased by 14.6% from \$9.6 million in 2009 to \$11 million in 2010. Apart from counselling and treatment services for gamblers and their family members, the four centres also provide training programmes for professionals such as social workers. By conducting school publicity and education programmes, the four centres also strengthen students' awareness of problem gambling.

(e) The way of how the media publish information on different aspects involves freedom of press and freedom of editorial choice. The Administration has urged the media to separate sports news on football matches from information on football betting. The BLC and PWFAC also convey the same message to the media from time to time.

Ends/Wednesday, June 9, 2010

NNNN