

LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT: PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF SPORTS GROUNDS

Executive Summary

1. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) provides support to the Home Affairs Bureau in the planning, provision and management of sports and recreation facilities, including sports grounds. According to LCSD, in general, a sports ground contains facilities for athletic track and field events and an in-field grassed area. While the main function of sports grounds is to provide venues for educational institutes (e.g. primary and secondary schools) and other relevant organisations to hold athletic events, sports grounds are also used for playing football including professional league matches. When a sports ground is not hired for exclusive use (e.g. hiring of the whole sports ground by a school for holding a sports day), its running track is open to the public for jogging. As of August 2021, LCSD managed 25 sports grounds. In 2020-21, the expenditure incurred in operation and management of LCSD sports grounds amounted to about \$213 million. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the provision and management of LCSD sports grounds.

Planning and provision

2. According to LCSD, in planning new sports facilities or improvement works, it makes reference to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) and takes into account other relevant considerations such as usage rates of existing facilities and demographic changes. HKPSG adopts a population-based standard in the provision for sports grounds, which is one sports ground per 200,000 to 250,000 population. Based on a provision standard of one sports ground per 250,000 population and the population of Hong Kong in 2020, Audit estimated that there could be a shortfall of 4.6 sports grounds (paras. 1.8 and 2.2).

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3. ***Room for improvement in measuring usage rate of sports grounds.*** According to the Controlling Officer's Reports of LCSD, the average usage rate of sports grounds in each year was 99% (exceeding the target of 95%) from 2016 to 2020. According to LCSD, the average usage rate of sports grounds aims at measuring the utilisation of track and field facilities of sports grounds (para. 2.3). Audit examined the calculation of average usage rate of sports grounds from 2016 to 2020 and noted the following issues:

- (a) ***Need to continue to take into account usage rate of a sports ground for its main function in future planning.*** When a sports ground is not hired for exclusive use, its running track is open to the public for jogging. Audit noted that usage by joggers accounted for over 80% of the total usage of sports grounds. The average usage rate of sports grounds reported in LCSD's Controlling Officer's Reports did not reflect the usage rate of a sports ground for its main function (i.e. to provide venues for educational institutes and other relevant organisations to hold athletic events) (paras. 1.11 and 2.5); and
- (b) ***Need to compile statistics on the number of joggers.*** Audit noted that, in calculating the average usage rate of sports grounds, LCSD did not take into consideration the actual number of joggers and the capacity of the running tracks. LCSD also did not require staff of sports grounds to compile statistics on the number of joggers. Between June and August 2021, Audit visited three sports grounds, i.e. the Aberdeen Sports Ground, the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground and the Sha Tin Sports Ground for inspections and examined their records. Audit found that while staff of the Sha Tin Sports Ground maintained hourly statistics on the number of joggers, staff of the other two sports grounds did not regularly maintain such statistics (para. 2.6).

4. ***Need to keep in view progress of redevelopment projects under the 5-year plan.*** The 2017 Policy Address announced the "Five-Year Plan for Sports and Recreation Facilities" (5-year plan) to launch projects between 2017 and 2022 to develop new and improve existing sports and recreation facilities. Under the 5-year plan, among other sports and recreation facilities, the Government would redevelop the Yuen Long Stadium, and conduct technical feasibility studies for redeveloping the Aberdeen Sports Ground and the Hong Kong Stadium. According to LCSD, as of November 2021, the three projects were on-going (paras. 1.9(a) and 2.9).

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5. ***Provision of facilities.*** Various facilities are provided in LCSD sports grounds, including running tracks, field facilities, in-field turf pitches, and other ancillary facilities (para. 2.12). Audit noted the following issues:

- (a) ***Need to closely monitor implementation progress of enhancement and improvement measures for drainage and irrigation systems.*** Since 2015, through regular inspections, LCSD has identified that the drainage and irrigation systems of 23 sports grounds with in-field turf pitches/areas should be enhanced. As of August 2021, the long-term enhancement and short-term improvement measures for the drainage system, and enhancement measures for the irrigation system had been completed/implemented in only 3, 20 and 14 sports grounds respectively (paras. 2.14 and 2.15);
- (b) ***Need to consider stepping up replacement of bubbler-type water dispensers.*** According to LCSD, water dispensers are provided in its leisure venues to enable the public to drink water after exercising. In addition, provision of water dispensers also helps reduce consumption of one-time plastic bottles and hence reduce waste at source. As of November 2021, a total of 99 water dispensers were provided in the 25 sports grounds. Of these 99 water dispensers, 4 (4%) were the bottle-filler type for filling water into bottles (Type A), 55 (56%) were the bubbler type for on-the-spot drinking (Type B), and 40 (40%) were the bottle-filler/bubbler type for both filling water into bottles and for on-the-spot drinking (Type C). Audit noted that:
 - (i) while Type A water dispenser was the most preferable as it addressed the concerns on bubbler contamination, only 4 (4%) of the 99 water dispensers provided in LCSD sports grounds were of this type;
 - (ii) 8 (32%) of the 25 sports grounds were provided with Type B water dispensers only; and
 - (iii) due to the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the use of all water dispensers in LCSD sports grounds had been suspended since 29 January 2020. On 26 September 2020, the use of bottle fillers of 12 (12%) of the 99 water dispensers was resumed (paras. 2.18 to 2.20); and

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- (c) ***Need to keep under review the enhancement of running tracks in two sports grounds.*** According to LCSD, it keeps constant review of the conditions of running tracks in its sports grounds. When defects are found, it will request the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) to conduct repair or refurbishment works as appropriate. Of the 25 sports grounds, as of August 2021, running track refurbishment works of 15 sports grounds were completed between 2012 and 2021, 2 were on-going, and 6 were planned for commencement between September 2021 and March 2024. For the remaining 2 sports grounds, LCSD informed Audit in October 2021 that:
- (i) for the Wo Yi Hop Road Sports Ground, ArchSD was working on the details of an in-field turf pitch upgrading programme, including the provision of new track facilities to tie in with the new pitch; and
 - (ii) for the Fanling Recreation Ground with a concrete-paved running track, due to the presence of numerous manhole covers, laying of an all-weather athletic track without relocating the manhole covers was not feasible. LCSD had requested ArchSD to explore if there were any other suitable paving materials (paras. 2.22 and 2.23).

Operational matters

6. ***Booking and allocation.*** LCSD sports grounds can be hired for athletic meets, training and other sports activities. Schools and organisations can hire the whole sports ground or the in-field turf pitch, whereas individuals can only hire the in-field turf pitch. LCSD booking guidelines set out the procedures for application, and the related payment and cancellation arrangements. Audit examined the records of 150 cases of successful applications between 2016 and 2020 by schools and organisations for using three sports grounds, i.e. the Aberdeen Sports Ground, the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground and the Sha Tin Sports Ground (paras. 1.11, 3.3 and 3.6), and noted the following issues:

- (a) ***Need to review requirements on submitting applications.*** According to LCSD booking guidelines, schools and organisations shall use designated application forms to book a sports ground or its in-field turf pitch. Information of two responsible persons should be included in the application form. Audit noted that in 66 (44%) of the 150 cases, the applicants did not use the designated application forms, and in

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19 (13%) cases, the applicants did not provide any information on the responsible persons (paras. 3.4(a) and 3.7);

- (b) ***Need to handle cancellation of bookings in accordance with guidelines.*** According to LCSD booking guidelines, for cancellation of confirmed bookings, a hirer shall notify LCSD at least 20 days in advance of the date of use and provide justifications for the cancellation. If a hirer does not notify LCSD of the cancellation at least 20 days in advance or does not show up at the venue (i.e. no-show), LCSD will request the hirer to provide written justifications. If no written justification is provided or LCSD is not satisfied with the justifications, LCSD will issue a default notice to the hirer. Audit noted that of the 150 cases, 22 (15%) involved cancellation or no-show. Of these 22 cases, only in 4 (18%) cases had the hirers notified LCSD of the cancellation more than 20 days in advance. In 17 of the remaining 18 cases, there were no records showing that the cancellation or no-show had been properly handled in accordance with LCSD booking guidelines (paras. 3.11 and 3.12); and
- (c) ***Need to ensure that monthly registers are prepared and checked.*** In order to maintain the quality of natural turf, LCSD limits the usage of the in-field turf pitches in 22 sports grounds with natural turf pitches. In general, the maximum number of 90-minute sessions for using an in-field turf pitch is 60 (maximum available sessions) per month. According to LCSD booking guidelines, only 30 of the 60 sessions shall be allocated to schools and organisations (i.e. at least 30 sessions shall be allocated for individual bookings). The monthly maximum available sessions allocated to schools and organisations may be adjusted based on the conditions of the in-field turf pitches and local demand. A monthly register of bookings for using the in-field turf pitches by schools and organisations shall be prepared for necessary control and follow-up actions. Audit found that in the period between January 2016 and December 2020 (60 months):
- (i) for the Aberdeen Sports Ground, there were no records on the monthly registers; and
 - (ii) for the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground and the Sha Tin Sports Ground, while available sessions allocated to schools and organisations exceeded 30 on a number of occasions, the justifications for adjusting the maximum number of sessions allocated to schools and organisations were not documented (paras. 1.6 and 3.13 to 3.15).

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7. ***Need to maintain proper check-in records.*** According to LCSD, check-in registers shall be maintained in each sports ground to record the taking up of booked sessions for using the sports ground and the in-field turf pitch. Audit examined the check-in registers of three sports grounds (see para. 6) in the period between January 2016 and December 2020 (60 months) and found that check-in registers were only available for some periods (ranging from 3 to 45 months) (paras. 3.20 and 3.21).

8. ***Different practices of concurrent use of in-field turf pitch and running track.*** With effect from 1 October 2002, to provide adequate buffer for safety of users, only the outer three lanes of the running track can be used for jogging when ball games are conducted in the in-field turf pitch of a sports ground. However, Audit noted that, in response to local demand, the outer four lanes (instead of three) of the running tracks in the Aberdeen Sports Ground and the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground could be used for jogging since February 2010 and February 2011 respectively (para. 3.25).

Venue management

9. ***Management of facilities.*** Between June and August 2021, Audit examined the management of various facilities of three sports grounds (see para. 6) and found room for improvement (para. 4.3). Audit noted the following issues:

- (a) ***Room for improvement in inventory management.*** LCSD guidelines on inventory management set out the requirements on conducting stocktakes. Audit noted that LCSD staff conducted stocktakes between 2017 and 2021 (up to June) in the three sports grounds as required and no irregularities were identified. However, Audit conducted a sample stocktake of 60 inventory items in the three sports grounds and noted that:
 - (i) there were discrepancies in 35 (58%) of the 60 items;
 - (ii) only 2 items were labelled with identification codes; and
 - (iii) no information on the storing locations of the items was kept on the inventory lists (paras. 4.4 and 4.5);

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- (b) ***Room for improvement in provision of equipment for emergency uses.*** Equipment for emergency uses, such as first-aid boxes and automatic external defibrillators (AEDs), is provided in LCSD sports grounds. Audit examined the provision of such equipment in the three sports grounds and noted the following non-compliance with LCSD guidelines on provision of first-aid equipment and AEDs in one or more of the three sports grounds:

- (i) some items were not provided in the first-aid rooms and first-aid boxes;
- (ii) lists of items with respective expiry dates were not displayed beside all first-aid boxes;
- (iii) daily inspections on AEDs were not always conducted between July 2020 and June 2021; and
- (iv) notices showing AED locations were not conspicuously displayed (paras. 4.7 to 4.9); and

- (c) ***Scope for better use of spaces.*** Audit examined the use of spaces in the three sports grounds and noted that in the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground:

- (i) of the 15 storerooms, 1 was used for storing sundry items and another was used for storing boxes of old records, some of which were closed about 22 years ago; and
- (ii) one accessible toilet on the first floor was locked and not open for public use. According to LCSD, the accessible toilet had not been used for years (para. 4.10).

10. ***Room for improvement in reporting and monitoring of maintenance works.*** The maintenance of building components, and electrical and mechanical equipment in LCSD sports grounds is performed by ArchSD, and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Trading Fund of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department respectively. LCSD guidelines on maintenance of leisure facilities set out guidance on reporting of defects and monitoring of maintenance works. Between June and August 2021, Audit visited three sports grounds (see para. 6) and examined the records of maintenance works. Audit noted that:

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- (a) all the three sports grounds recorded maintenance works on maintenance works registers. While a register of standard format with different fields was adopted in the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground, no similar register of standard format was adopted in the Aberdeen Sports Ground and the Sha Tin Sports Ground;
- (b) of the 779 maintenance works requests made between January and December 2020, information (e.g. identification date of defects and completion date of works) recorded in 298 (38%) requests was inadequate for taking follow-up actions; and
- (c) for the period between January 2016 and August 2021, there was no record on outstanding maintenance works. However, Audit noted that two sets of solar water heating systems (for supplementary water pre-heating purpose) were reported out of order in April 2017 in the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground and follow-up actions were taken in 2019 and 2020 (paras. 4.18 to 4.20).

11. ***Room for improvement in conducting inspections.*** LCSD inspection guidelines set out the objectives and requirements on inspections of sports grounds. The objectives of conducting inspections include ensuring that the relevant guidelines, procedures and code of practice are properly followed and implemented, and the facilities are safe, clean and serviceable for use by the public. Audit examined the records on the inspections conducted between 2017 and 2021 (up to June) in the three sports grounds (see para. 6) and noted that:

- (a) the supervisory inspection records of 2019 in the Aberdeen Sports Ground and those of 2020 in the Sha Tin Sports Ground were not available for audit examination;
- (b) the required frequencies of supervisory inspections were not always met and the justifications for not conducting or reducing the frequency of inspections were not documented; and
- (c) no checklists were provided to facilitate sports ground staff to conduct the daily inspections. An exceptional reporting approach was adopted and only occasional records were found, leaving no trail of the follow-up actions taken (paras. 4.24 and 4.25).

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Audit recommendations

12. Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should:

Planning and provision

- (a) continue to take into account the usage rate of a sports ground for its main function in future planning of sports grounds (para. 2.7(a));
- (b) require LCSD staff to regularly maintain statistics on the number of joggers using running tracks of sports grounds (para. 2.7(b));
- (c) keep in view the progress of the redevelopment projects for LCSD sports grounds under the 5-year plan and take measures to ensure their timely completion (para. 2.10);
- (d) closely monitor the implementation progress of the enhancement and improvement measures for the drainage and irrigation systems in the in-field turf pitches/areas of LCSD sports grounds (para. 2.24(a));
- (e) consider stepping up the replacement of Type B water dispensers in LCSD sports grounds (para. 2.24(c));
- (f) closely monitor the progress of the in-field turf pitch upgrading programme (including the provision of new track facilities) in the Wo Yi Hop Road Sports Ground, and continue to explore the feasibility of replacing the concrete-paved running track in the Fanling Recreation Ground by suitable paving materials (para. 2.24(e));

Operational matters

- (g) review the objectives and effectiveness of the requirement to submit designated application forms for using LCSD sports grounds and in-field turf pitches, and streamline the application procedures as appropriate (para. 3.16(a));

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- (h) ensure that the requirement to provide information on responsible persons in submitting applications is complied with (para. 3.16(b));
- (i) ensure compliance by hirers with the 20 days' advance notification requirement on cancellation of bookings for using sports grounds and in-field turf pitches (para. 3.16(e));
- (j) remind LCSD staff to request written justifications from hirers in case of booking cancellation and no-show as appropriate, maintain proper records on LCSD's acceptance or otherwise of the justifications, and issue default notices when necessary (para. 3.16(f));
- (k) remind LCSD staff to prepare monthly registers on the use of in-field turf pitches in LCSD sports grounds by schools and organisations (para. 3.16(g));
- (l) ensure that the justifications for adjusting the maximum number of sessions allocated to schools and organisations for using in-field turf pitches in LCSD sports grounds are documented (para. 3.16(h));
- (m) ensure that check-in records are properly maintained in all LCSD sports grounds in future (para. 3.23(a));
- (n) conduct a review on the current arrangements of concurrent use of in-field turf pitch and running track in LCSD sports grounds (para. 3.26);

Venue management

- (o) take improvement measures in inventory management in LCSD sports grounds as appropriate (para. 4.16(a) and (b));
- (p) ensure that the guidelines on the provision of first-aid equipment and AEDs are complied with in all LCSD sports grounds (para. 4.16(c));

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- (q) **review whether the two storerooms and the accessible toilet in the Kowloon Bay Sports Ground can be put into more gainful uses (para. 4.16(d));**
- (r) **enhance record keeping on maintenance works in LCSD sports grounds as appropriate (para. 4.22(a) and (c)); and**
- (s) **review and update the inspection requirements with a view to achieving the objectives of LCSD inspections (para. 4.26(a)).**

Response from the Government

13. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services agrees with the audit recommendations.