

# **CHAPTER 8**

## **Development Bureau**

### **Work of the Development Bureau in tree management**

**Audit Commission  
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*This audit review was carried out under a set of guidelines tabled in the Provisional Legislative Council by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee on 11 February 1998. The guidelines were agreed between the Public Accounts Committee and the Director of Audit and accepted by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.*

Report No. 85 of the Director of Audit contains 8 Chapters which are available on our website (<https://www.aud.gov.hk>).



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# WORK OF THE DEVELOPMENT BUREAU IN TREE MANAGEMENT

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# WORK OF THE DEVELOPMENT BUREAU IN TREE MANAGEMENT

## Executive Summary

1. Trees are integral parts of the outdoor environment and contribute positively to the city's liveability. The Government strives to uplift the quality of the living environment through active planting, proper maintenance and preservation of trees together with other vegetation. The overall policy responsibility for greening, landscape and tree management rests with the Development Bureau (DEVB). While the Tree Management Office (TMO — established under the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section of DEVB) coordinates and oversees the departmental tree management work, the responsibilities for preserving and maintaining trees on government land are assigned among relevant government departments (including conducting tree risk assessment and management (TRAM), and the handling of tree failure incidents and tree-related complaints). Given the large number and wide distribution of trees, the Government adopts an “integrated approach” for the management of trees on government land (i.e. the department responsible for the maintenance of an area or a facility is also responsible for the maintenance of trees there). As at 31 December 2024, there were 40 tree management departments (i.e. 9 core tree management departments and 31 non-core tree management departments) and about 1.7 million trees on government land were under regular care.

2. The Urban Forestry Support Fund (UFSF) was launched in mid-2020 to encourage youngsters to join the arboriculture and horticulture industry, to uplift the professional standards of arboriculture and horticulture practitioners, and to strengthen public education and promotion on proper tree care. UFSF supports DEVB to implement initiatives related to urban forestry, including the Study Sponsorship Scheme (SSS), the Trainee Programme (TP), the International Urban Forestry Conferences, and public education and promotion campaigns. As at 30 April 2025, \$64.8 million (32%) of the \$200 million funding earmarked for UFSF was utilised. Besides, to uplift the quality of tree management personnel and the professional standing of the industry, DEVB launched the Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel (RSTMP) in December 2020. As at 30 April 2025, there were 977 practitioners registered under RSTMP. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the work of DEVB in tree management.

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### Coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work

3. ***Scope for improvement in using computer system in tree management.*** According to DEVB, for each TRAM cycle (which generally runs from October to May of the following year), tree management departments should complete the tree risk assessments and submit the completed tree inspection reports (i.e. Form 1 reports for tree group inspections and Form 2 reports for individual tree risk assessments) to TMO via the Tree Management Common Platform (TMCP) or other system interfaces (for transferring data to TMCP). Besides, during the phased implementation of TMCP with progressive adoption by the tree management departments, the departments are also required to submit progress reports to TMO. Audit noted that there was scope for improvement in using TMCP in tree management (paras. 1.7, 2.4 and 2.6), as follows:

- (a) ***Differences in numbers of tree inspection reports.*** While TMCP was fully implemented in July 2025 and DEVB would utilise TMCP to monitor the progress and performance of TRAM and extract data from TMCP from the 2025-26 TRAM cycle onwards, the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports were consistently larger than those submitted to TMCP for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles. DEVB needs to ensure the data integrity of input by tree management departments in TMCP (paras. 2.5(a), 2.6(b) and 2.7(a)); and
- (b) ***Need to enhance validation check in TMCP.*** According to DEVB, built-in validation check is available in TMCP to ensure the correctness of data in tree inspection reports. However, Audit examination noted some anomalies in the data maintained in TMCP. For example, TMCP allows the date of inspection being inputted as a date later than the date of submission of tree inspection reports (para. 2.5(b)).

4. ***Increase in percentages of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified.*** The Guidelines for Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement (the TRAM Guidelines) promulgated by DEVB provide technical and performance guidance on tree risk assessment, management, monitoring and maintenance for tree management departments. According to DEVB, the inspection squad established under TMO will audit the tree inspection reports submitted by the tree management departments to identify if there is any irregularity. Audit noted that the percentages of Form 1 reports and Form 2 reports with irregularities identified by TMO's audits

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increased from 16% and 8% in the 2021-22 TRAM cycle to 30% and 38% in the 2023-24 TRAM cycle respectively. DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that tree management departments conduct tree inspections in accordance with the requirements in the TRAM Guidelines (paras. 2.3, 2.10, 2.11 and 2.13).

5. ***Scope for improvement in monitoring submission of reports or summaries for tree failures.*** DEVB guidelines set out the reporting requirements for tree failures by tree management departments. According to DEVB, from January 2022 to April 2025, there were 1,367 tree failure incidents reported to TMO, of which 1,088 (80%) took place on government land. Audit examination noted that there was scope for improvement in monitoring submission of reports or summaries for tree failures (paras. 2.24 to 2.26), as follows:

- (a) ***Need to strengthen monitoring of submission of tree failure reports.*** Audit examined the case files of 100 tree failure incidents reported to TMO in 2024 that took place on government land, and noted that: (i) in 57 (57%) incidents, while it was stated in the case files that the tree management departments concerned had conducted site inspections, tree failure reports were not submitted by the departments and there was no documentation showing the justifications (e.g. minor incidents that took place within the remote areas of country parks); and (ii) of the remaining 43 (43%) incidents, 4 were serious/significant incidents involving fatality and/or injury (i.e. requiring submission of tree failure reports as soon as practicable) and 39 were other serious/significant incidents or other minor incidents (i.e. requiring submission of tree failure reports within 10 working days). The reports of the 4 serious/significant incidents involving fatality and/or injury and 11 (28% of 39) other incidents were submitted to TMO 4 to 86 working days (averaging 27 working days) and 11 to 107 working days (averaging 36 working days) from the dates of incident respectively (para. 2.26(a)); and
  
- (b) ***Need to strengthen monitoring of submission of massive tree failure summaries.*** According to DEVB guidelines, tree management departments are required to submit massive tree failure summaries to TMO within 72 hours after the lowering of the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8. Audit noted that there was no management information for monitoring the timely submission of the summaries by tree management departments in accordance with DEVB guidelines (para. 2.26(b)).

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6. *Need to analyse the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents.* According to the TRAM Guidelines, tree management departments should categorise all the sites under their management into three categories of tree risk management zones (i.e. Category I, Category II and Category III zones) according to the risk levels. For the trees within Category I zones (i.e. high tree risk management zones), tree management departments should conduct tree group inspections annually and individual tree risk assessments in accordance with the results of tree group inspections. Audit examination of the case files of the 100 tree failure incidents (see para. 5(a)) noted that: (a) for the 57 tree failure incidents without tree failure reports submitted by tree management departments, there was no management information showing the category of the tree risk management zone of the trees involved in these incidents; and (b) all the remaining 43 tree failure incidents took place within Category I zones. In the respective preceding TRAM cycle before the tree failure incidents, tree group inspections were conducted for the trees involved in all the 43 incidents, while individual tree risk assessments were conducted for the trees involved in 10 (23%) incidents. DEVB needs to analyse the tree failure incidents (including reviewing the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents) and share the lessons learnt with the tree management departments (paras. 2.3 and 2.28 to 2.30).

### Urban Forestry Support Fund

7. *Scope for improvement in submitting applications by SSS programme providers.* For Category (1), Category (2) and Scholarship programmes of SSS, SSS programme providers shall submit to DEVB a consolidated list of applicants within 1 month after the commencement of each recognised programme and the funding disbursement applications within 4 months from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters. Audit examined the applications submitted by SSS programme providers from July 2020 to April 2025 and noted that: (a) 26 of the 155 consolidated lists of applicants submitted by SSS programme providers were submitted more than 1 month from the commencement of each recognised programme, ranging from 32 to 137 days (averaging 60 days); and (b) for the 800 funding disbursement applications due for submission by SSS programme providers as at 30 April 2025: (i) 70 applications were submitted more than 4 months from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters, ranging from 124 to 831 days (averaging 177 days); and (ii) 33 applications had not been submitted, with time lapsed of more than 4 months from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters to 30 April 2025, ranging from 127 to 1,321 days (averaging 416 days) (paras. 3.4 and 3.5).

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8. ***Scope for improvement in commissioning the administrator of TP.*** The Construction Industry Council (CIC) was directly commissioned by DEVB to administer TP (para. 3.16). Audit noted the following issues:

- (a) ***Lack of proper documentation for the considerations and decision that engaging CIC did not constitute a procurement of service.*** According to DEVB, the engagement of CIC to administer TP under a partnering arrangement was not a procurement of service, and was not subject to the Stores and Procurement Regulations. However, as far as could be ascertained, there was no documentation on the relevant considerations and decision that engaging CIC did not constitute a procurement of service, at variance with the requirement stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 on management of funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government (paras. 3.15 and 3.16); and
- (b) ***Formal agreement not entered into with CIC.*** CIC commenced preparatory work for administering TP in April 2020 before the launch of TP in August 2020. However, DEVB did not enter into a formal agreement with CIC before the commencement of service. Up to August 2025, a formal agreement was still yet to be entered into (para. 3.17).

DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that the requirements stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 are complied with in managing future funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government, and enter into a formal agreement with CIC for administering TP as soon as possible (paras. 3.16 and 3.18).

9. ***Need to review administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP.*** According to Financial Circular No. 2/2017, the Controlling Officer should formulate a policy on whether there should be a ceiling for administrative overheads included in the project cost and charged to the grant, and ensure that the administrative charges are reasonable and proportionate to the purpose, scale, nature and circumstances of a particular fund or project. However, Audit noted that, up to April 2025, the total administration costs paid to CIC of \$8.7 million accounted for 32% of the total expenditure incurred for TP under UFSF of \$27.5 million. Furthermore, DEVB had not set a ceiling for the administration costs paid to CIC, and there was no documentation showing the justifications for not setting a ceiling. DEVB needs to keep under review the level of administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP and take measures to contain the administration costs (paras. 3.20 to 3.22).

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10. *Need to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP.* Audit noted that there was scope for DEVB to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP (para. 3.33), as follows:

- (a) *Levels of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP below targets.* Audit noted that, for the 4 years from 2021 to 2024, except for the study sponsorship under SSS in 2024, the actual numbers of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP were below the respective annual targets throughout the period (para. 3.33(a));
- (b) *High withdrawal/drop-out rates under SSS/TP.* As at 30 April 2025:
  - (i) 106 (8%) of the 1,258 initial applications received (from July 2020 to April 2025) under SSS were withdrawn by the applicants before the completion of recognised programmes; and
  - (ii) 103 (36%) of the 283 trainees admitted (from August 2020 to April 2025) under TP dropped out and did not complete TP (para. 3.33(b)); and
- (c) *Scope for improvement in conducting evaluation surveys on beneficiaries under SSS and TP.* According to DEVB, it has invited all beneficiaries under SSS and TP to complete evaluation surveys to collect feedbacks to evaluate the effectiveness of SSS and TP. However, Audit noted that only 37 (4%) of the 893 graduates of SSS recognised programmes and 39 (67%) of the 58 trainees who had completed TP returned the completed surveys (para. 3.33(c)).

## Registration scheme and other issues

11. *Need to timely complete processing of applications.* According to DEVB, qualified in-service practitioners are encouraged to register as one or more of the five types of tree management personnel under RSTMP on a voluntary basis. Since the launch of RSTMP in December 2020 and up to April 2025, DEVB had received 1,884 applications for registration and 318 applications for renewal of registration. The application notes issued by DEVB set out the requirements and procedures of applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP. Audit examination noted that there was scope for improvement in processing the applications by DEVB (paras. 4.2 to 4.4), as follows:

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(a) ***Timeframe for notifying applicants of application results not met.*** According to the application notes, applicants will normally be notified of the application results for registration and renewal within 6 weeks (i.e. 42 days) upon receipt of duly completed application forms with all necessary supporting documents, or upon satisfactory verification of documents and/or receipt of supplementary information (i.e. the receipt of required information). As at 30 April 2025: (i) of the 1,827 processed applications for registration, the applicants of 138 applications were notified 43 days to 12 months (averaging 3 months) after the dates of receipt of required information; and (ii) of the 280 processed applications for renewal of registration, the applicants of 7 applications were notified 49 days to 9 months (averaging 4 months) after the dates of receipt of required information (para. 4.5); and

(b) ***Long time taken in obtaining required information.*** The 6-week notification timeframe stipulated in the application notes is only applicable since the dates of receipt of required information. As at 30 April 2025: (i) of the 1,827 processed applications for registration, the applicants of 348 applications had provided supplementary information as required 43 days to 10 months (averaging 3 months) from the dates of application; and (ii) of the 280 processed applications for renewal of registration, the applicants of 50 applications had provided supplementary information as required 43 days to 11 months (averaging 4 months) from the dates of application (para. 4.6).

12. ***Late applications related to renewal of registration.*** Each registration of personnel type under RSTMP is valid for three years. According to the application notes, application for renewal of registration or extension of validity period of the current registration for 6 months should be made at least 10 weeks before the expiry date of the current registration. From December 2020 to April 2025, DEVB had received 318 applications for renewal of registrations, involving 755 registrations of personnel type. Audit noted that some applications were submitted after the deadline, as follows: (a) the tree management personnel of 490 registrations had applied for extension of validity period and all were approved. Of these registrations, the applications of 97 (20%) registrations were submitted 2 to 91 days (averaging 38 days) after the deadline; and (b) of the 610 registrations with applications for renewal approved, the applications of 206 (34%) registrations were submitted 1 to 101 days (averaging 40 days) after the deadline (paras. 4.9 and 4.10).

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13. **Way forward of RSTMP.** Audit noted that: (a) according to a survey conducted by DEVB prior to the launch of RSTMP, half of the respondents supported a voluntary scheme as a start and a mandatory scheme in the long term. Since the launch of RSTMP in December 2020 and up to April 2025, DEVB had not conducted any similar surveys regarding the implementation of a mandatory registration scheme; (b) in March 2023, DEVB had completed a study for developing the requirements of local professional assessments and trade tests under RSTMP. As at 30 April 2025, the local professional assessments and trade tests had not yet been incorporated into RSTMP; and (c) to promote proper management of trees on private land, DEVB published the Handbook on Tree Management in April 2016. While RSTMP was launched in December 2020, it had not yet been incorporated into the Handbook as at 30 April 2025. DEVB needs to review the implementation of RSTMP with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for RSTMP, taking into account all relevant factors and the audit observations and recommendations in this Audit Report (paras. 4.16 and 4.17).

14. **Scope for improvement in adoption of new technology in tree management work.** Audit noted that, in August 2021, DEVB launched a three-year study programme to collect and analyse the tree movement data captured by tilt sensors installed on 8,000 trees. In January 2023, DEVB recommended more extensive use of technology in tree management, including considering extending the use of tilt sensors having regard to the findings of the study ending in 2024. In August 2024, the study on tilt sensors was completed and it was recommended to expand the sensor network. As at 30 April 2025, the tilt sensors installed on the 8,000 trees deployed in the study were not in use and no tilt sensors were installed on more trees. According to DEVB, it had been considering further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work. DEVB needs to expedite the consideration of further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work (paras. 4.20 to 4.22).

### Audit recommendations

15. **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 Secretary for Development should:**

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### *Coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work*

- (a) **ensure the data integrity of input and enhance validation check in TMCP (para. 2.21(a));**
- (b) **ensure that tree management departments conduct tree inspections in accordance with the requirements in the TRAM Guidelines (para. 2.21(c));**
- (c) **ensure that tree failure reports and massive tree failure summaries are timely submitted by tree management departments and justifications of not requiring submission are properly documented (para. 2.34(a));**
- (d) **analyse the tree failure incidents (including reviewing the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents) and share the lessons learnt with the tree management departments (para. 2.34(b));**

### *UFSF*

- (e) **ensure that SSS programme providers timely submit consolidated lists of applicants and funding disbursement applications in accordance with the stipulated timeframes and take follow-up actions on outstanding cases as appropriate (para. 3.11(b));**
- (f) **in managing future funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government, ensure that the requirements stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 are complied with, including maintaining proper documentation of:**
  - (i) **all relevant considerations and decisions for the engagement of a non-government partner to administer the project (para. 3.30(a)(i)); and**
  - (ii) **the justifications for not setting a ceiling for the administration costs paid to a non-government partner for administering the project (para. 3.30(a)(ii));**

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- (g) enter into a formal agreement with CIC for administering TP as soon as possible (para. 3.30(b));
- (h) keep under review the level of administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP and take measures to contain the administration costs (para. 3.30(d));
- (i) further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP (para. 3.38(a));

### *Registration scheme and other issues*

- (j) ensure that the applicants for registration and renewal under RSTMP are notified of the application results in accordance with the stipulated timeframes, and the applicants timely submit the required information (para. 4.18(a) and (b));
- (k) keep monitoring the timeliness of submission of applications related to renewal of registration under RSTMP by the registered tree management personnel (para. 4.18(c));
- (l) review the implementation of RSTMP with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for RSTMP (para. 4.18(e)); and
- (m) expedite the consideration of further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work (para. 4.25(a)).

## Response from the Government

16. The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations.

## **PART 1: INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This PART describes the background to the audit and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

### ***Background***

1.2 Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets. Trees (Note 1) are integral parts of the outdoor environment and contribute positively to the city’s liveability. They provide amenity areas, moderate temperature, improve air quality and enhance biodiversity. However, trees are living organisms and have a life cycle of growth, aging, disease and decline. Tree health conditions will deteriorate with age and change with surroundings. The Government strives to uplift the quality of the living environment through active planting, proper maintenance and preservation of trees together with other vegetation.

1.3 The overall policy responsibility for greening, landscape and tree management rests with the Development Bureau (DEVB). In March 2010, DEVB established the Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section (GLTMS), which is underpinned by two offices, as follows:

- (a) ***Greening and Landscape Office (GLO)***. GLO is responsible for the central coordination of greening and landscape planning and design efforts; and
- (b) ***Tree Management Office (TMO)***. TMO serves as a central authority to lead and coordinate the effective implementation of the “integrated approach” on tree management (see para. 1.5(b)). TMO is also responsible for advocating the adoption of a professional approach to tree management among government departments and in the community at large, as well as dealing with complex cases which cannot be adequately handled by individual departments.

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**Note 1:** *According to the Development Bureau, for the work in tree management, “tree” refers to a plant with trunk diameter of 95 millimetres or more at a height of 1.3 metres above the ground level, as defined in the Development Bureau Technical Circular (Works) No. 4/2020 “Tree Preservation”.*

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1.4 As at 30 April 2025, GLTMS had 52 staff, comprising 29 professional/technical staff, 13 administrative/supporting staff and 10 non-civil service staff. The recurrent expenditure of GLTMS in 2024-25 was about \$76 million. According to DEVB, GLO and TMO work in close cooperation to promote a holistic approach to landscape and tree management, and there is no separate breakdown of the expenditure incurred solely for the work in tree management. An extract of DEVB's organisation chart as at 30 April 2025 is at Appendix A.

### *Coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work*

1.5 The Government is committed to the proper management of trees to ensure healthy tree growth while emphasising the need to safeguard public safety. According to DEVB:

- (a) while TMO coordinates and oversees the departmental tree management work, the responsibilities for preserving and maintaining trees on government land are assigned among relevant government departments; and
- (b) given the large number and wide distribution of trees, the Government adopts an "integrated approach" for the management of trees on government land. The department responsible for the maintenance of an area or a facility is also responsible for the maintenance of trees there in accordance with the requirements and guidelines promulgated by DEVB. As at 31 December 2024, there were 40 tree management departments (i.e. 9 core tree management departments and 31 non-core tree management departments — Note 2) and about 1.7 million trees on government land were under regular care. For trees on private land, private property owners are responsible for the proper maintenance of trees on their properties. DEVB does not maintain the statistics of the trees on private land.

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**Note 2:** *According to DEVB: (a) core tree management departments refer to the 9 tree management departments (see Table 2 in para. 2.2(c)(i)) which maintain a large number of trees and have in-house expertise responsible for a wide range of work related to greening, landscape and tree management; and (b) there are other government bureaux and departments which also maintain trees on government land. For simplicity, these bureaux and departments are referred to as non-core tree management departments in this Audit Report.*

1.6 ***Tree risk assessment and management (TRAM) arrangement.*** Proper tree maintenance and systematic tree risk assessment are effective means to reduce the risk of tree failure. DEVB introduced the Guidelines for Tree Risk Assessment and Management Arrangement (hereinafter referred to as the TRAM Guidelines) since 2010 to provide relevant technical and performance guidance for tree management departments to implement TRAM. According to DEVB, the TRAM Guidelines have been continuously reviewed and enhanced with reference to international best practices and practical experiences. According to the latest version (i.e. the 10th edition), which was promulgated in September 2023, tree risk assessment is in general conducted in two stages, as follows:

- (a) ***Area Basis Assessment.*** Tree management departments should first identify high priority areas where the public will be affected if a tree fails and categorise all the sites under their management into high (Category I zone), medium (Category II zone) and low (Category III zone) tree risk management zones for areas of high traffic and/or pedestrian flows, low traffic and/or pedestrian flows, and rare access respectively. For Category I zones, departments are required to conduct tree risk assessment and implement necessary mitigation measures (e.g. removal of dead branches and pruning) at least once every year before the onset of the wet season (Note 3); and
- (b) ***Tree Basis Assessment.*** The risk assessment on tree basis comprises tree group inspection and individual tree risk assessment, as follows:
  - (i) ***Tree group inspection.*** The main objective of tree group inspection is to facilitate an initial screening of trees. Each tree in a tree group is inspected systematically for identifying potential tree hazards or trees requiring more detailed individual tree risk assessment; and
  - (ii) ***Individual tree risk assessment.*** After completing the tree group inspection, individual tree risk assessment should be carried out to assess the health and structural conditions of individual trees as recommended in the tree group inspection.

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**Note 3:** *According to the TRAM Guidelines, the tree risk management frequency of: (a) Category II zones is every 3 to 5 years, if resources permit, and when necessary (e.g. acting on complaints); and (b) Category III zones is when necessary.*

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1.7 In general, the annual TRAM cycle runs from October to May of the following year. Tree management departments implementing TRAM should record all the findings of the inspections using standardised forms (i.e. Form 1 reports for tree group inspections and Form 2 reports for individual tree risk assessments) and submit the completed tree inspection reports (i.e. Form 1 and Form 2 reports) to TMO. To strengthen the tree inspection work carried out by tree management departments, TMO established an inspection squad in October 2019 to audit the tree inspection reports. According to DEVB, as at 30 April 2025, the tree management departments completed a total of 209,485 tree inspection reports (comprising 147,898 Form 1 reports and 61,587 Form 2 reports) for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles (Note 4).

1.8 *Tree failure incidents.* According to DEVB:

- (a) upon receipt of reports made by the public on tree failure incidents (including fallen trees, trunk failures and branch failures), the 1823 (i.e. a government round-the-clock one-stop service to answer enquiries, and to receive and refer service requests/complaints) and/or relevant government departments (e.g. the Fire Services Department) will report the incidents to TMO. The tree failure incidents would be handled as follows:
  - (i) for tree failure incidents that take place on government land, the responsible tree management departments are required to conduct site inspection as soon as practicable. The departments should also submit tree failure reports with key information on the incidents (e.g. location and tree species) to TMO in accordance with the requirements stipulated in DEVB guidelines. TMO would consolidate the information of tree failure incidents, and share the key observations and lessons learnt with other departments; and
  - (ii) for tree failure incidents that take place on private land, an advisory letter would be issued to the land owners urging them to take

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**Note 4:** *According to DEVB, as at 30 April 2025, the 2024-25 TRAM cycle was still in progress. The final statistics of tree inspection reports completed by the tree management departments for the 2024-25 TRAM cycle would only be available by the end of 2025, after completion of checking with all the tree management departments.*

appropriate actions (e.g. conducting tree risk assessment and implementing mitigation measures); and

- (b) from January 2020 to April 2025, a total of 2,020 tree failure incidents were reported to TMO (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

**Number of tree failure incidents reported to TMO  
(January 2020 to April 2025)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total (Note 1)</b>	<b>Resulting in loss of human life (Note 2)</b>	<b>Resulting in injury (Note 2)</b>	<b>Resulting in damage to properties (Note 2)</b>
2020	358	–	16	137
2021	295	–	13	127
2022	271	2	18	135
2023 (Note 3)	481	–	23	214
2024 (Note 4)	537	–	13	238
2025 (up to April)	78	–	8	43
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,020</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>894</b>

*Source: DEVB records*

*Note 1: According to DEVB, a single tree failure incident may result in loss of human life, injury and/or damage to properties.*

*Note 2: According to DEVB: (a) there are no separate records on the maintenance party for tree failure incidents prior to January 2022; and (b) from January 2022 to April 2025, of the 2, 62 and 630 tree failure incidents resulting in loss of human life, injury and damage to properties respectively, 0 (0%), 15 (24%) and 83 (13%) took place on private land respectively.*

*Note 3: According to DEVB, the significant increase in the number of tree failure incidents reported in 2023 was due to the impacts of Super Typhoon Saola and Severe Typhoon Koinu in September 2023.*

*Note 4: According to DEVB, the significant increase in the number of tree failure incidents reported in 2024 was due to the impacts of exceptionally severe rainstorm in May 2024 and Super Typhoon Yagi in September 2024.*

## Introduction

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1.9 *Tree-related complaints.* Tree management departments are responsible for responding to the complaints referred by the 1823 or received from other sources (e.g. directly received by tree management departments or referred by DEVB) about trees under their maintenance. TMO monitors the handling of tree-related complaints by the departments at the central level. When there are disputes on the maintenance responsibility among the departments, the cases may be escalated to TMO for mediation and/or adjudication. According to DEVB, the majority of tree-related complaints are referred by the 1823 or directly received by tree management departments. From January 2023 to April 2025, a total of 58,713 such complaints were received by the 9 core tree management departments (Note 5).

### *Urban Forestry Support Fund*

1.10 The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China announced in her 2019 Policy Address to launch the Urban Forestry Support Fund (UFSF) to implement a number of initiatives related to urban forestry. With the approval of funding by the Legislative Council (LegCo) in May 2020, the \$200 million UFSF was launched in mid-2020. The objectives of UFSF are to encourage youngsters to join the arboriculture and horticulture industry, to uplift the professional standards of arboriculture and horticulture practitioners, and to strengthen public education and promotion on proper tree care.

1.11 With a view to improving the quality of our urban forest, protecting public safety and enhancing liveability, UFSF supports DEVB to implement the following initiatives related to urban forestry:

- (a) *Study Sponsorship Scheme (SSS).* SSS provides financial incentives to encourage eligible students and practitioners to undertake arboriculture, tree management and tree work programmes offered by local vocational, tertiary and training institutions (hereinafter referred to as SSS programme providers);

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**Note 5:** *According to DEVB: (a) the 9 core tree management departments were requested to provide returns on the tree-related complaints directly received by them since 2023; and (b) there is no complete record on the statistics of tree-related complaints received by non-core tree management departments (see para. 2.37(a)).*

- (b) ***Trainee Programme (TP)***. TP enables arboriculture and tree management graduates to receive on-the-job training for acquiring practical working experience. The Construction Industry Council (CIC) was commissioned by DEVB to administer TP (including processing applications, monitoring training progress, and processing training allowance reimbursements);
- (c) ***International Urban Forestry Conferences (IUFCs)***. IUFCs provide a platform for the sharing of experience and expertise in tree management and conservation work among government authorities, professional bodies, academics and practitioners; and
- (d) ***Public education and promotion campaigns***. Public education and promotion campaigns enhance public appreciation of trees and understanding of proper tree care, and to raise youngsters' interest in arboriculture.

As at 30 April 2025, the total expenditure of UFSF was \$64.8 million, of which, SSS, TP, IUFCs, and public education and promotion campaigns accounted for \$10.6 million (16%), \$27.5 million (43%), \$8.4 million (13%) and \$18.3 million (28%) respectively.

### ***Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel***

1.12 To uplift the quality of tree management personnel and the professional standing of the industry, DEVB launched the Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel (RSTMP) in December 2020. Practitioners meeting the respective academic, professional, training, occupational safety and health training, and/or work experience requirements may apply for registration for one or more of the five types of tree management personnel (i.e. arborists, tree risk assessors, tree work supervisors, tree climbers and chainsaw operators) on a voluntary basis. A performance monitoring mechanism has been formulated to monitor and regulate the performance of registered tree management personnel. As at 30 April 2025, there were 977 practitioners registered for one or more personnel types under RSTMP.

## **Introduction**

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### **Audit review**

1.13 In May 2025, the Audit Commission (Audit) commenced a review of the work of DEVB in tree management. The audit review has focused on the following areas:

- (a) coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work (PART 2);
- (b) UFSF (PART 3); and
- (c) registration scheme and other issues (PART 4).

Audit has found room for improvement in the above areas and has made a number of recommendations to address the issues.

### **General response from the Government**

1.14 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that DEVB welcomes the review on tree management conducted by Audit and will take appropriate follow-up actions and improvement measures according to the audit recommendations.

### **Acknowledgement**

1.15 Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of DEVB during the course of the audit review.

## **PART 2: COORDINATION AND OVERSEEING OF DEPARTMENTAL TREE MANAGEMENT WORK**

2.1 This PART examines the coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work by DEVB, focusing on:

- (a) monitoring of tree risk assessments (paras. 2.3 to 2.22);
- (b) handling of tree failure incidents (paras. 2.23 to 2.35); and
- (c) handling of tree-related complaints (paras. 2.36 to 2.43).

### ***Integrated approach for management of trees on government land***

2.2 According to DEVB:

- (a) the Government adopts an “integrated approach” in assigning the responsibilities for preserving and maintaining trees on government land among relevant departments. In general, the demarcation of maintenance responsibilities is based on where the trees are located and which departments are responsible for maintaining the facilities thereon. The departments are then responsible for maintaining the trees under their purview as part and parcel of their daily work;
- (b) the Lands Department (LandsD) is responsible for providing ad hoc maintenance of the trees on unleased and unallocated government land (UUGL) that are not designated for maintenance by any other departments (hereinafter these trees are referred to as trees on UUGL under LandsD) when a requirement is identified and/or a complaint/referral is

## **Coordination and overseeing of departmental tree management work**

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received (Note 6). Besides, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) is responsible for the management of vegetation in country parks, including undertaking vegetation management for the trees in remote areas of country parks. Trees on UUGL under LandsD and trees in remote areas of country parks cannot be counted due to their large quantities;

- (c) other than the trees mentioned in (b) above, as at 31 December 2024, about 1,749,000 trees were under regular care of 39 tree management departments, as follows:
  - (i) 8 of the 9 core tree management departments (i.e. except LandsD) were responsible for maintaining about 1,566,000 trees (including the trees in frequently used areas and facilities of country parks managed by AFCD) (see Table 2); and
  - (ii) 31 non-core tree management departments were responsible for maintaining about 183,000 trees (Note 7); and
- (d) TMO under GLTMS of DEVB formulates overall tree management strategies and measures, and coordinates and oversees the tree maintenance efforts of government departments. DEVB issued various guidelines on tree management work to the tree management departments, including the guidelines on audit of tree risk assessment, and the handling of tree failure incidents and tree-related complaints.

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**Note 6:** *According to DEVB, the maintenance responsibilities of the trees on UUGL are assigned among tree management departments in accordance with DEVB Technical Circular (Works) No. 6/2015 “Maintenance of Vegetation and Hard Landscape Features”. If the trees on UUGL are not designated for maintenance by any other departments according to the Technical Circular, LandsD will carry out ad hoc maintenance of these trees when a requirement is identified and/or a complaint/referral is received.*

**Note 7:** *According to DEVB, similar to the core tree management departments, DEVB maintains regular communications with and provides support and advice to all the non-core tree management departments to ensure that they comply with relevant circulars and guidelines.*

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**Table 2**

**Number of trees maintained by the 9 core tree management departments  
(31 December 2024)**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of trees (Note 1)</b>
Highways Department	574,000
Leisure and Cultural Services Department	539,000
Water Supplies Department	148,700
Architectural Services Department	140,000
Housing Department	84,800
Civil Engineering and Development Department	32,700
AFCD	28,000 (Note 2)
Drainage Services Department	18,800
LandsD	N.A. (Note 3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,566,000</b>

*Source: DEVB records*

*Note 1: The numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred.*

*Note 2: The number represents the number of trees in frequently used areas and facilities of country parks only (i.e. excluding trees in remote areas of country parks).*

*Note 3: According to DEVB, LandsD will provide ad hoc maintenance of the trees on UUGL that are not designated for maintenance by any other departments. An exact number is not available due to their large quantity (see para. 2.2(b)). LandsD will take follow-up actions when a requirement is identified and/or a complaint/referral is received.*

## **Monitoring of tree risk assessments**

2.3 The TRAM Guidelines promulgated by DEVB provide technical and performance guidance on tree risk assessment, management, monitoring and maintenance for tree management departments. According to DEVB, since the initial issuance of the TRAM Guidelines in 2010, DEVB has continuously reviewed and enhanced the TRAM Guidelines with reference to international best practices and practical experiences. According to the latest version (i.e. the 10th edition), which

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was promulgated in September 2023, the key objectives of TRAM are to maximise public safety and establish sustainable tree care practices. Tree risk assessment is in general conducted in two stages (i.e. Area Basis Assessment and Tree Basis Assessment — see para. 1.6), as follows:

- (a) tree management departments should first categorise all the sites under their management into three categories of tree risk management zones (i.e. Category I, Category II and Category III zones) according to the risk levels. For Category I zones (i.e. high tree risk management zones), tree management departments are required to conduct tree risk assessment and implement necessary mitigation measures at least once every year before the onset of the wet season with a view to reducing the risk of tree failure and protecting public safety; and
- (b) within the tree risk management zones, tree management departments should conduct risk assessment on tree basis (comprising tree group inspection and individual tree risk assessment) in accordance with the frequency specified in the TRAM Guidelines. Depending on the conditions of individual trees, mitigation measures including removal of dead branches, pruning, pest and disease control, and/or tree removal may be taken.

### ***Scope for improvement in using computer system in tree management***

2.4 According to DEVB:

- (a) the Tree Management Common Platform (TMCP) was launched in August 2020 for use by tree management departments, as follows:
  - (i) it is a system for managing and sharing tree-related information among government departments. Its main objectives include supporting the tree risk assessment and enhancing collaboration among user departments; and
  - (ii) it is a digital common and map-based platform. User departments can use maps to identify tree locations, examine tree information, enquire about the past records of tree risk assessment and undertake spatial data analysis;

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- (b) some tree management departments had their own tree management systems prior to the launch of TMCP in August 2020. They were required to enhance their systems to interface the tree inspection reports with TMCP;
- (c) for each TRAM cycle (which generally runs from October to May of the following year), tree management departments should complete the tree risk assessments and mitigation measures in accordance with the TRAM Guidelines, and submit the completed tree inspection reports (i.e. Form 1 and Form 2 reports) to TMO via TMCP or other system interfaces (for transferring data to TMCP); and
- (d) apart from submitting the completed tree inspection reports to TMCP, tree management departments are also required to submit progress reports (including the numbers of completed tree inspection reports and mitigation measures, and other relevant data) to TMO.

2.5 Audit noted that there was scope for improvement in using TMCP in tree management, as follows:

- (a) ***Differences in numbers of tree inspection reports.*** For the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles:
  - (i) there were differences between the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports and those submitted to TMCP by the tree management departments; and
  - (ii) the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports were consistently larger than those submitted to TMCP (see Table 3).

According to DEVB, it referred to the progress reports, instead of TMCP records, when reporting the number of completed tree inspection reports; and

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**Table 3**

**Numbers of completed tree inspection reports  
reported in the progress reports and those submitted to TMCP  
(30 April 2025)**

TRAM cycle	Number of Form 1 reports			Number of Form 2 reports		
	Reported in progress reports (a)	Submitted to TMCP (b)	Difference (Note 1) (c) = (a)-(b)	Reported in progress reports (d)	Submitted to TMCP (e)	Difference (Note 1) (f) = (d)-(e)
2020-21	36,011	18,820	17,191 (48%)	9,006	3,322	5,684 (63%)
2021-22	35,731	19,746	15,985 (45%)	9,218	3,408	5,810 (63%)
2022-23	36,806	30,524	6,282 (17%)	9,546	8,225	1,321 (14%)
2023-24	39,350	34,899	4,451 (11%)	33,817 (Note 2)	32,373 (Note 2)	1,444 (4%)
Overall	147,898	103,989	43,909 (30%)	61,587	47,328	14,259 (23%)

Source: DEVB records

Note 1: The percentage of the difference between the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports and those submitted to TMCP is calculated as the difference divided by the number reported in the progress reports.

Note 2: According to DEVB, the significant increase in the number of Form 2 reports for individual tree risk assessments was due to the expansion of the scope of individual tree risk assessments to cover additional trees since the 2023-24 TRAM cycle.

- (b) **Need to enhance validation check in TMCP.** According to DEVB, built-in validation check is available in TMCP to ensure the correctness of data in tree inspection reports. However, Audit examination noted some anomalies in the data maintained in TMCP. For example, TMCP allows the date of inspection being inputted as a date later than the date of submission of tree inspection reports. Besides, some data fields for tree parameters (e.g. height and aggregated diameter at breast height) in some Form 2 reports submitted to TMCP were inputted as zero or null.

2.6 In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that:

- (a) TMCP was launched in August 2020 with progressive adoption by the tree management departments. For the tree management departments using their own tree management systems, the system interface work took time to complete. During the phased implementation, DEVB had required tree management departments to submit progress reports, in parallel with the submission of tree inspection reports to TMCP. It was observed that the differences between the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports and those submitted to TMCP had been narrowing; and
- (b) following the completion of system interface work by the tree management departments, TMCP was fully implemented in July 2025 and DEVB would utilise TMCP to monitor the progress and performance of TRAM and extract data from TMCP from the 2025-26 TRAM cycle onwards.

2.7 Audit noted that the differences between the numbers of completed tree inspection reports reported in the progress reports and those submitted to TMCP for Form 1 and Form 2 reports in the 2023-24 TRAM cycle were 4,451 and 1,444 respectively. In Audit's view, with a view to better utilising TMCP to monitor the progress and performance of TRAM, DEVB needs to:

- (a) ensure the data integrity of input by tree management departments in TMCP; and
- (b) enhance validation check in TMCP.

***Scope for improvement in monitoring the submission of  
tree inspection reports***

2.8 According to DEVB, as at 30 April 2025, the tree management departments had reported in the progress reports that a total of 147,898 Form 1 reports for tree group inspections and 61,587 Form 2 reports for individual tree risk assessments were completed for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles. Audit noted that there was scope for improvement in monitoring the submission of tree inspection reports, as follows:

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- (a) ***Need to clarify the submission timeframes.*** There are two timeframes for submission of tree inspection reports specified in different guidelines issued by DEVB, as follows:
- (i) ***Submission Timeframe A.*** According to DEVB guidelines, since April 2020, tree management departments are required to submit tree inspection reports to TMO on or before the fifteenth day of the next month upon completion of the reports by their in-house staff or receipt of the reports from their contractors; and
  - (ii) ***Submission Timeframe B.*** In September 2023, a new requirement was added in the TRAM Guidelines such that all tree inspection reports should be submitted to TMO within 2 months from the dates of inspection.

The guidelines did not specify which Submission Timeframe will take precedence when there is a clash between the two; and

- (b) ***Need to strengthen the monitoring of submission of tree inspection reports.*** Audit noted that:
- (i) ***Submission Timeframe A.*** TMO did not maintain management information (e.g. dates of completion or receipt of tree inspection reports) to monitor whether the tree management departments submitted tree inspection reports in accordance with Submission Timeframe A; and
  - (ii) ***Submission Timeframe B.*** From October 2023 (i.e. when Submission Timeframe B became effective) to April 2025, 57,263 Form 1 reports and 45,597 Form 2 reports were submitted to TMCP, of which 17,877 (31%) and 21,626 (47%) were submitted more than 2 months from the dates of inspection (i.e. not meeting Submission Timeframe B), ranging from more than 2 to 17 months (averaging 4 months) and from more than 2 to 15 months (averaging 5 months) respectively. According to DEVB, many tree inspection reports were submitted beyond the set timeframe as TMCP was still in the phased implementation during the period.

- 2.9 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:
- (a) review and align the timeframes in guidelines for submission of tree inspection reports; and
  - (b) take measures to strengthen the monitoring of timely submission of tree inspection reports by the tree management departments.

***Increase in percentages of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified***

2.10 According to DEVB, the inspection squad established under TMO will audit the tree inspection reports submitted by the tree management departments to identify if there is any irregularity. TMO's audits involve desktop reviews and site inspections. Desktop reviews primarily focus on checking the completeness of information and identifying faulty inputs in the tree inspection reports. During site inspections, trees will be inspected, the tree risk assessments will be verified and the proposed mitigation measures will be reviewed. According to DEVB guidelines, 5% of Form 1 reports and 5% of Form 2 reports submitted by tree management departments will be selected and audited by TMO for each TRAM cycle.

2.11 As at 30 April 2025, of the 147,898 Form 1 reports and the 61,587 Form 2 reports completed for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles, TMO had audited 7,573 (5%) Form 1 reports and 3,238 (5%) Form 2 reports. Audit noted that there was an increase in the percentages of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified by TMO's audits, as follows:

- (a) the percentages of Form 1 reports with irregularities identified by TMO's audits increased from 16% in the 2021-22 TRAM cycle to 30% in the 2023-24 TRAM cycle; and
- (b) the percentages of Form 2 reports with irregularities identified by TMO's audits increased from 8% in the 2021-22 TRAM cycle to 38% in the 2023-24 TRAM cycle (see Table 4).

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**Table 4**

**Percentages of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified  
(30 April 2025)**

TRAM cycle	Form 1 reports			Form 2 reports		
	Number of reports audited (a)	Number of reports with irregularities identified (b)	Percentage (c) = (b) ÷ (a) × 100%	Number of reports audited (d)	Number of reports with irregularities identified (e)	Percentage (f) = (e) ÷ (d) × 100%
2020-21	1,865	350	19%	519	59	11%
2021-22	1,818	298	16%	491	38	8%
2022-23	1,896	507	27%	508	100	20%
2023-24	1,994	605	30%	1,720	655	38%
Overall	7,573	1,760	23%	3,238	852	26%

*Source: DEVB records*

2.12 According to DEVB, the TRAM Guidelines have been continuously reviewed and enhanced. With the implementation of the updated TRAM Guidelines in September 2023, new requirements on tree risk assessments, including the expansion of the scope of individual tree risk assessment, enhanced implementation of risk mitigation measures and more extensive use of technology in tree management, have been introduced since the 2023-24 TRAM cycle. This may contribute to the increase in the percentages of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified by TMO's audits.

2.13 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that tree management departments conduct tree inspections in accordance with the requirements in the TRAM Guidelines, such as enhancing the briefings provided to the tree management departments to ensure a thorough understanding of the new requirements on tree risk assessments.

***Need to timely follow up overdue feedback from tree management departments***

2.14 According to DEVB:

- (a) if any irregularity is identified by TMO's audits of tree inspection reports, TMO will send audit referrals to the tree management departments concerned, and the departments are required to provide feedback to TMO within 10 working days from the dates of referral; and
- (b) apart from auditing tree inspection reports, the inspection squad established under TMO will proactively inspect trees in not less than 100 locations of high pedestrian and vehicular traffic flow every year to identify potentially hazardous trees. TMO will refer the potentially hazardous trees identified to the tree management departments concerned, and the departments are required to provide feedback to TMO within 10 working days from the dates of referral. From January 2020 to April 2025, TMO referred a total of 412 cases of potentially hazardous trees to tree management departments.

2.15 According to DEVB, the details of referrals issued (e.g. dates of issue and status of feedback) were maintained in paper files and there were no management reports summarising the information. Audit selected 50 cases of audit referrals of tree inspection reports for the 2020-21 to 2023-24 TRAM cycles with irregularities identified by TMO and 50 cases of referrals of potentially hazardous trees for examination, and noted that there was scope for improvement in monitoring the feedback provided by the tree management departments, as follows:

- (a) ***Audit referrals of tree inspection reports with irregularities identified.*** Of the 50 cases of audit referrals of tree inspection reports examined by Audit, the feedback in response to audit referrals in 16 (32%) cases was provided by the tree management departments concerned to TMO 11 to 75 working days (averaging 29 working days) from the dates of issue, at variance with the 10-working-day requirement. As far as could be ascertained, there was no documentation showing that follow-up actions (e.g. issuing reminders) were taken by TMO when the feedback in response to audit referrals was overdue; and

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- (b) *Referrals of potentially hazardous trees.* Of the 50 cases of referrals of potentially hazardous trees examined by Audit:
  - (i) the feedback in response to referrals in 14 (28%) cases was provided by the tree management departments concerned to TMO 11 to 78 working days (averaging 31 working days) from the dates of issue, at variance with the 10-working-day requirement; and
  - (ii) while TMO had issued reminders to the tree management departments concerned in 6 (43%) of the 14 overdue cases, there was no documentation showing that follow-up actions (e.g. issuing reminders) were taken by TMO for the remaining 8 (57%) overdue cases.

2.16 In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that in some overdue referrals, the follow-up actions taken were not duly documented. In Audit's view, regarding the irregularities identified by TMO's audits of tree inspection reports and potentially hazardous trees identified by TMO's proactive inspections, DEVB needs to:

- (a) take measures to ensure that tree management departments provide feedback within the specified timeframes; and
- (b) take timely follow-up actions on overdue feedback from tree management departments and properly document the follow-up actions taken.

### ***Need to consider further enhancing tree management work on UUGL***

2.17 Audit noted that all the tree management departments, except LandsD, have implemented TRAM in accordance with the TRAM Guidelines. Besides, there were no detailed records or statistics of trees on UUGL under LandsD (see Table 2 in para. 2.2(c)(i)).

2.18 According to DEVB:

- (a) as UUGL constitutes about one-third of the land area in Hong Kong and there are no detailed records or statistics of trees thereon (except those trees maintained by the departments), it would not be feasible for any department to conduct annual inspection and regular maintenance on all the trees on UUGL. LandsD is only assigned to carry out ad hoc maintenance work (e.g. tree felling and trimming) for the trees on UUGL that are not designated for maintenance by any other departments when a requirement is identified and/or a complaint/referral is received;
- (b) tree management work on UUGL has been strengthened progressively. In October 2015, DEVB issued Technical Circular (Works) No. 6/2015 “Maintenance of Vegetation and Hard Landscape Features” stipulating that, among other things:
  - (i) the maintenance responsibility of roadside trees on UUGL that within 10 metres from kerb along existing non-expressway public roads outside country parks (which is considered a more risky zone should a tree failure incident occur) rests with the Leisure and Cultural Services Department; and
  - (ii) LandsD continues to carry out ad hoc maintenance of the trees on UUGL that are not designated for maintenance by any other departments when a requirement is identified and/or a complaint/referral is received (which is considered a less risky zone) and handle referrals and complaints about these trees;
- (c) in September 2022, DEVB set up the Task Force on Roadside Tree Planting and Maintenance, which was chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Development (Works) with members from tree management departments, to review the prevailing tree management arrangement (Note 8). The Task Force completed the review in December 2022. In reporting the

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**Note 8:** *According to DEVB: (a) in September 2022, an incident involving the collapse of a 9.5-metre tall tree growing at a tree pit along the roadside resulted in injury and damage to properties. DEVB then set up the Task Force on Roadside Tree Planting and Maintenance; and (b) in October 2022, a fatal incident involving a tree on UUGL occurred in a village.*

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observations of the Task Force to the Panel on Development of LegCo in January 2023, DEVB recommended that LandsD should proactively arrange periodic inspections with a risk-based approach by focusing on trees along village roads with high pedestrian and/or vehicular traffic flow for selected villages in order to strengthen the maintenance of the trees on UUGL under LandsD having regard to the resources implications; and

- (d) LandsD had been implementing a three-year inspection plan to conduct inspections for 120 most populated villages starting from 2024. The inspections were specifically aimed at identifying trees along village roads that posed imminent danger, for prompt removal and necessary mitigation measures, or had potential hazard and further tree risk assessment was required. This approach reflects a proactive strategy for effectively addressing potential tree risks while safeguarding the public safety. As at 30 April 2025, the inspections for 97 (81%) villages had been completed.

2.19 While acknowledging LandsD's challenges and its efforts in strengthening the handling of ad hoc maintenance of the trees on UUGL as required, Audit noted that, there were 1,088 tree failure incidents on government land reported to TMO from January 2022 to April 2025 (see para. 2.25(b)(i)), of which 508 involved trees on UUGL that were not designated for routine maintenance by any department. Of the 508 tree failure incidents, 12 (2%) resulted in casualties and 302 (59%) resulted in damage to properties. While LandsD has already put in place the practice of following up on any tree failure incident on UUGL with additional inspection of the tree in question and also trees in the vicinity, there was no management information showing whether the locations of these tree failure incidents had been covered under LandsD's current three-year inspection work.

2.20 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to, in conjunction with LandsD, having regard to the results of the three-year inspection work for trees along village roads of the selected villages starting from 2024, consider further enhancing tree management work on UUGL, including:

- (a) maintaining records or statistics of the trees inspected by LandsD; and
- (b) reviewing the scope of the village inspections (e.g. the need to cover the locations of tree failure incidents).

## **Audit recommendations**

- 2.21 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**
- (a) **ensure the data integrity of input by tree management departments in TMCP and enhance validation check in TMCP with a view to better utilising TMCP to monitor the progress and performance of TRAM;**
  - (b) **review and align the timeframes in guidelines for submission of tree inspection reports, and take measures to strengthen the monitoring of timely submission of tree inspection reports by the tree management departments;**
  - (c) **take measures to ensure that tree management departments conduct tree inspections in accordance with the requirements in the TRAM Guidelines, such as enhancing the briefings provided to the tree management departments to ensure a thorough understanding of the new requirements on tree risk assessments;**
  - (d) **regarding the irregularities identified by TMO's audits of tree inspection reports and potentially hazardous trees identified by TMO's proactive inspections:**
    - (i) **take measures to ensure that tree management departments provide feedback within the specified timeframes; and**
    - (ii) **take timely follow-up actions on overdue feedback from tree management departments and properly document the follow-up actions taken; and**
  - (e) **in conjunction with the Director of Lands, having regard to the results of the three-year inspection work for trees along village roads of the selected villages starting from 2024, consider further enhancing tree management work on UUGL, including maintaining records or statistics of the trees inspected by LandsD and reviewing the scope of the village inspections (e.g. the need to cover the locations of tree failure incidents).**

## **Response from the Government**

2.22 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB is enhancing the validation check in TMCP to ensure the integrity of data input by tree management departments;
- (b) DEVB is reviewing guidelines to align the timeframes for submission of tree inspection reports, and has enhanced the monitoring mechanism to track and follow up with tree management departments on the submission progress of tree inspection reports;
- (c) DEVB has conducted three training sessions on TRAM in 2025 for tree management departments and contractors, enhancing their understanding on the requirements of TRAM Guidelines, with a view to enabling the conduct of tree risk assessments. DEVB will continue to provide regular and targeted TRAM training to ensure compliance;
- (d) DEVB has set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure timely responses from tree management departments and proper documentation of follow-up actions taken on audit and tree inspection referrals; and
- (e) the first cycle of periodic inspection by LandsD is set to last for 3 years, with a target to complete by 2027. DEVB, in conjunction with LandsD, will conduct an interim review on the record-keeping of village inspection results and the overall scope of the inspections to identify areas for improvements.

## **Handling of tree failure incidents**

2.23 According to DEVB guidelines:

- (a) depending on the characteristics or consequential implications, tree failure incidents are classified into three classes, i.e. serious incidents, significant incidents and minor incidents; and

- (b) tree management departments should set out their internal standing arrangements as appropriate to promptly respond to and deal with tree failure incidents that may take place on government land under their purview.

***Scope for improvement in monitoring submission of reports or summaries for tree failures***

2.24 DEVB guidelines set out the reporting requirements for tree failures by tree management departments, including submission of reports or summaries to TMO, as follows:

- (a) ***Tree failure reports.*** Tree management departments are not required to submit individual tree failure reports for fallen trees reported in the massive tree failure summaries (see (b) below) and those minor incidents that took place within the remote areas of country parks. For other tree failure incidents, departments should submit tree failure reports to TMO via TMCP within specified timeframes, as follows:
  - (i) for serious/significant incidents involving fatality and/or injury, tree management departments should submit the tree failure reports to TMO as soon as practicable; and
  - (ii) for other serious/significant incidents and other minor incidents (i.e. incidents not involving fatality and/or injury), tree management departments should submit the tree failure reports to TMO within 10 working days from the dates of incident; and
- (b) ***Massive tree failure summaries.*** Within 72 hours after the lowering of the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8, tree management departments should collate the estimated numbers of fallen trees on government land and submit the massive tree failure summaries to TMO via TMCP or emails. The departments are not required to submit individual tree failure reports.

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2.25 According to DEVB:

- (a) TMO maintained a tree failure register to record all the reports on tree failure incidents received (Note 9). TMO had also maintained separate records on the maintenance party of trees involved in the tree failure incidents reported to it since January 2022; and
- (b) from January 2022 to April 2025:
  - (i) there were 1,367 tree failure incidents reported to TMO, of which 1,088 (80%) took place on government land; and
  - (ii) there were a total of 6,920 fallen trees on government land after the issue of Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above.

2.26 Audit examination noted that there was scope for improvement in monitoring submission of reports or summaries for tree failures, as follows:

- (a) ***Need to strengthen monitoring of submission of tree failure reports.*** While the tree failure register maintained by TMO records information such as the dates of receipt, maintenance party, districts in which the incidents took place and the consequences (e.g. injury and/or damage to properties), other relevant details and follow-up actions (e.g. class of incidents, whether submission of tree failure reports was required and dates of submission of reports (if submitted)) are maintained in separate case files. Audit examined the case files of 100 tree failure incidents reported to TMO in 2024 that took place on government land, and noted that:
  - (i) in 57 (57%) incidents, while it was stated in the case files that the tree management departments concerned had conducted site inspections, tree failure reports were not submitted by the departments. Of these 57 incidents, 30 (53% of 57) involved

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**Note 9:** *According to DEVB, the tree failure incidents recorded in the tree failure register are reported by the public via the 1823 and/or relevant government departments (see para. 1.8(a)). The trees involved in these incidents may have been included in the number of fallen trees reported in the massive tree failure summaries.*

damage to properties. There was no documentation showing the justifications of not requiring submission of tree failure reports (e.g. these incidents had been reported in the massive tree failure summaries or were minor incidents that took place within the remote areas of country parks). According to DEVB, tree failure reports were not submitted by the departments in some cases as there were no defective trees identified after conducting site inspections. Besides, some departments had submitted photo records instead of tree failure reports to TMO after carrying out the necessary tree works; and

(ii) in the remaining 43 (43%) incidents, tree failure reports were submitted by the tree management departments concerned. Of the 43 incidents:

- 4 were serious/significant incidents involving fatality and/or injury (i.e. requiring submission of tree failure reports as soon as practicable), and the reports of these incidents were submitted to TMO 4 to 86 working days (averaging 27 working days) from the dates of incident; and
- 39 were other serious/significant incidents or other minor incidents (i.e. requiring submission of tree failure reports within 10 working days), and the reports of 11 (28%) incidents were submitted to TMO 11 to 107 working days (averaging 36 working days) from the dates of incident; and

(b) ***Need to strengthen monitoring of submission of massive tree failure summaries.*** According to DEVB guidelines, tree management departments are required to submit massive tree failure summaries to TMO within 72 hours after the lowering of the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8. Audit noted that there was no management information for monitoring the timely submission of the summaries by tree management departments in accordance with DEVB guidelines.

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2.27 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that:

- (a) tree failure reports and massive tree failure summaries are timely submitted by tree management departments in accordance with DEVB guidelines (e.g. compiling management information for monitoring purpose); and
- (b) justifications of not requiring submission of tree failure reports for tree failure incidents are properly documented.

### ***Need to analyse the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents***

2.28 According to the TRAM Guidelines, tree management departments should categorise all the sites under their management into three categories of tree risk management zones (i.e. Category I, Category II and Category III zones) according to the risk levels. For the trees within Category I zones, tree management departments should conduct tree group inspections annually and individual tree risk assessments in accordance with the results of tree group inspections.

2.29 Audit examination of the case files of the 100 tree failure incidents reported to TMO in 2024 that took place on government land (see para. 2.26(a)) noted that:

- (a) for the 57 tree failure incidents without tree failure reports submitted by tree management departments, there was no management information showing the category of the tree risk management zone of the trees involved in these incidents; and
- (b) all the remaining 43 tree failure incidents took place within Category I zones. In the respective preceding TRAM cycle before the tree failure incidents, tree group inspections were conducted for the trees involved in all the 43 incidents, while individual tree risk assessments were conducted for the trees involved in 10 (23%) incidents.

2.30 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to analyse the tree failure incidents (including reviewing the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents) and share the lessons learnt with the tree management departments.

***Scope for improvement in recording the maintenance party of trees involved in tree failure incidents***

2.31 Audit noted that, for the 1,367 tree failure incidents reported to TMO from January 2022 to April 2025, the maintenance party of the trees involved in 99 (7%) incidents was classified as “unidentified” or “N/A” in the tree failure register maintained by TMO. Of the 99 tree failure incidents, 42 (42%) resulted in damage to properties.

2.32 According to DEVB, all the 99 tree failure incidents had been duly followed up by the relevant tree management departments. The maintenance party was classified as “unidentified” or “N/A” in the register because either there were no failed trees observed at the reported locations or no trees at the areas concerned required mitigation measures after inspections by the relevant tree management departments.

2.33 In Audit’s view, for better clarity, there is merit for DEVB to review the practice of recording tree failure incidents in the tree failure register, in particular those with maintenance party classified as “unidentified” or “N/A”.

**Audit recommendations**

2.34 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**

- (a) **take measures to ensure that tree failure reports and massive tree failure summaries are timely submitted by tree management departments in accordance with DEVB guidelines and justifications of not requiring submission of tree failure reports for tree failure incidents are properly documented;**
- (b) **analyse the tree failure incidents (including reviewing the tree risk assessments conducted for the trees before failure incidents) and share the lessons learnt with the tree management departments; and**

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- (c) review the practice of recording tree failure incidents in the tree failure register, in particular those with maintenance party classified as “unidentified” or “N/A”.

## **Response from the Government**

2.35 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB has set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure timely submission of tree failure reports and massive tree failure summaries by tree management departments;
- (b) DEVB has consistently reviewed tree failure incidents and tree risk assessment reports, sharing observations and lessons learnt with tree management departments in the Heads of Departments Meeting on Tree Management and the Works and Maintenance Committee on Greening meetings. DEVB will continue to review tree failure incidents and provide observations to tree management departments with a view to minimising the further occurrence of similar incidents; and
- (c) all received tree failure incidents have been duly followed up by the relevant tree management departments. For cases where the departments subsequently reported that no failed trees or no trees requiring mitigation measures could be found upon follow-up inspections, DEVB will verify the cases with the tree management departments. If it is confirmed that the reported tree failures cannot be found, the case will be taken out from the register.

## **Handling of tree-related complaints**

2.36 According to DEVB:

- (a) TMO monitors the handling of tree-related complaints by tree management departments at the central level. DEVB issued guidelines to the tree management departments setting out the workflows for handling tree-related complaints;

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- (b) majority of tree-related complaints are referred by the 1823 or directly received by tree management departments. From January 2023 to April 2025, a total of 58,713 such complaints were received by the 9 core tree management departments (see Table 5); and
- (c) with the new guidelines for handling tree-related complaints promulgated in September 2023 (see para. 2.39), the performance on complaint handling by tree management departments has improved. From October 2023 to April 2025, over 98% of tree-related complaints received by the 9 core tree management departments were replied within the specified timeframes. The average handling time was also reduced to around 5 working days.

**Table 5**

**Number of tree-related complaints received by  
the 9 core tree management departments  
(January 2023 to April 2025)**

Year	Referred by the 1823 (a)	Directly received by departments (b)	Total (c) = (a) + (b)
2023	24,256	4,209	28,465
2024	20,584	3,908	24,492
2025 (up to April)	4,634	1,122	5,756
Total	49,474	9,239	58,713

*Source: DEVB records*

***Scope for improvement in compiling management information on  
tree-related complaints to facilitate DEVB's monitoring work***

2.37 Audit noted that:

- (a) ***Tree-related complaints directly received by non-core tree management departments.*** According to DEVB, under the prevailing practice, regular returns would be collated from the 9 core tree management departments and the Home Affairs Department (a non-core tree management

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department) on the number of complaints received by them for monitoring purpose. As such, the DEVB records on the number of tree-related complaints did not include those received by the other non-core tree management departments. As at 31 December 2024, these non-core tree management departments (i.e. except the Home Affairs Department) were responsible for maintaining about 182,000 trees. According to DEVB, as the majority of the trees managed by the other non-core tree management departments were either within confined premises or with little interference with the public, returns were not collated from them. Furthermore, there had been no request for assistance on handling tree-related complaints from the non-core tree management departments. Therefore, the prevailing practice in compiling management information on tree-related complaints was considered adequate for DEVB's monitoring work; and

- (b) *Tree-related complaints received by DEVB.* According to DEVB, for complaints received, it will address the enquiries on the policy of tree management and refer the complaints about specific trees to the responsible tree management departments to follow up and respond. From January 2020 to April 2025, DEVB received a total of 1,996 complaints. While DEVB maintained a register of all the complaints it received, these complaints were not included in the complaint statistics.

2.38 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to keep under review the need to include complaints received by all the tree management departments when compiling management information on tree-related complaints.

### ***Scope for improvement in monitoring the handling of tree-related complaints with disputes on maintenance responsibility***

2.39 The 1823 will assign the tree-related complaints received to the tree management departments. According to DEVB guidelines issued in September 2023:

- (a) the assigned department should make a request to the 1823 within 7 working days for reassignment if it considers that the case is not within its jurisdiction. The 1823 will assign the case to another department, which may request reassignment again; and

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- (b) complaints with disputes on maintenance responsibility should be escalated as follows:
  - (i) when three departments have been involved (i.e. the case had been assigned by the 1823 thrice), the case should be escalated to officers at the senior professional rank or equivalent of relevant departments (i.e. the Departmental Coordinators); and
  - (ii) if the case cannot be resolved (i.e. disputes on maintenance responsibility are not resolved and substantive reply is not provided to the complainant) by the Departmental Coordinators within 7 working days from the date of escalation or the case remains unresolved within 28 working days from the date of receipt of the complaint, the case should be escalated to directorate grade officers of relevant departments (i.e. the Departmental Complaints Officers) and TMO for review, mediation and/or adjudication.

2.40 Monthly reports are provided by the 1823 to TMO for tree-related complaints referred by the 1823 for monitoring purpose. Audit examined the monthly reports provided by the 1823 to TMO for October 2023 to April 2025 and noted that some complaints with disputes on maintenance responsibility were not timely escalated in accordance with DEVB guidelines, as follows:

- (a) ***Complaints not resolved by Departmental Coordinators within 7 working days.*** During the period, 218 (0.7%) of 31,538 tree-related complaints received were escalated to the Departmental Coordinators. Of the 218 complaints, 42 (19%) complaints were not resolved by the Departmental Coordinators within 7 working days from the dates of escalation to the Departmental Coordinators and should be escalated to the Departmental Complaints Officers and TMO in accordance with DEVB guidelines. While 2 of the 42 complaints were escalated to the Departmental Complaints Officers and TMO within 7 working days, of the remaining 40 complaints:

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- (i) 23 (58% of 40) were not escalated to the Departmental Complaints Officers and TMO, and were resolved by the Departmental Coordinators 8 to 18 working days (averaging 10 working days) from the dates of escalation to the Departmental Coordinators. According to DEVB, as these cases were in the process of resolution by the Departmental Coordinators by the end of 7 working days, it was therefore considered not necessary to trigger the next escalation; and
  - (ii) 17 (42% of 40) were escalated to the Departmental Complaints Officers and TMO 8 to 12 working days (averaging 9 working days) from the dates of escalation to the Departmental Coordinators; and
- (b) ***Complaints not resolved within 28 working days from the dates of receipt of complaints.*** During the period, there were another 10 (0.03% of 31,538) tree-related complaints remained unresolved within 28 working days from the dates of receipt of complaints but they were only escalated to the Departmental Coordinators (instead of the Departmental Complaints Officers and TMO as required by DEVB guidelines) 29 to 45 working days (averaging 35 working days) from the dates of receipt of complaints. In the event, these 10 cases were resolved 31 to 47 working days (averaging 37 working days) from the dates of receipt of complaints. According to DEVB, while these 10 cases were not escalated to the Departmental Complaints Officers as required by DEVB guidelines, they were resolved in around 2 working days on average after escalation to the Departmental Coordinators, demonstrating the effectiveness of the escalation mechanism.

2.41 According to DEVB, TMO would follow up with departments where the progress in handling tree-related complaints is not satisfactory and request for timely follow-up actions, and proactively intervene in complex cases to expedite the clarification of tree management responsibilities. In Audit's view, DEVB needs to continue to monitor the progress in handling tree-related complaints by tree management departments and to facilitate the clarification of tree management responsibilities as appropriate.

## **Audit recommendations**

- 2.42 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Development should:**
- (a) **keep under review the need to include complaints received by all the tree management departments when compiling management information on tree-related complaints; and**
  - (b) **continue to monitor the progress in handling tree-related complaints by tree management departments and to facilitate the clarification of tree management responsibilities as appropriate.**

## **Response from the Government**

2.43 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) the number of tree-related complaints received by the 9 core tree management departments and the Home Affairs Department has been regularly collated by DEVB for monitoring purposes. The remaining 30 non-core tree management departments maintain only about 3.5% of the total number of trees in areas with high pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Therefore, the data are not included in the compiled management information. DEVB will keep under review the need to refine the management information compilation; and
- (b) DEVB is proactively following up with the departments concerned and facilitating the clarification of tree management responsibilities for tree-related complaints that could not be resolved by departments within the set timeframes. DEVB will continue to monitor and facilitate proper handling of tree-related complaints as appropriate.

## **PART 3: URBAN FORESTRY SUPPORT FUND**

3.1 This PART examines DEVB's work in management of UFSF, focusing on:

- (a) administration of SSS (paras. 3.2 to 3.12);
- (b) administration of TP (paras. 3.13 to 3.31); and
- (c) performance monitoring of UFSF (paras. 3.32 to 3.39).

### **Administration of the Study Sponsorship Scheme**

3.2 To encourage more people, especially youngsters, to pursue careers in tree management, DEVB has been providing financial incentives (i.e. study sponsorship and scholarship) to eligible students and practitioners to undertake recognised arboriculture, tree management and tree work programmes offered by local vocational, tertiary and training institutions through SSS under UFSF since July 2020.

3.3 Programmes fulfilling specified criteria are eligible for enlisting as recognised programmes under SSS, which are classified into 5 categories, as follows:

- (a) ***Category (1): Arboriculture and Tree Management Programmes.*** Full-time or part-time programmes at Level 2 to Level 5 of the Qualifications Framework (QF) related to arboriculture or tree management are eligible. The level of study sponsorship is 70% of the payable tuition fee or \$35,000 (whichever is less). As at 30 April 2025, there were 12 recognised programmes with 488 approved applications;
- (b) ***Category (2): Tree Work Programmes.*** Full-time or part-time programmes at Level 2 to Level 5 of QF related to tree work (e.g. chainsaw operation and tree climbing) are eligible. The level of study sponsorship is 70% of the payable tuition fee or \$10,000 (whichever is less). As at 30 April 2025, there were 7 recognised programmes with 281 approved applications;

- (c) **Category (3): Training Programmes in Tree Risk Assessment.** Training programmes in tree risk assessment accepted by TMO as the training qualification of RSTMP are eligible. The level of study sponsorship is 70% of the payable tuition fee or \$10,000 (whichever is less). As at 30 April 2025, there were 5 recognised programmes with 102 approved applications;
- (d) **Category (4): Arboriculture Vocational Assessment — Chainsaw Operation.** Arboriculture vocational assessment for undertaking tree pruning works involving the use of chainsaw accepted by TMO are eligible. The level of study sponsorship is 70% of the assessment fee or \$10,000 (whichever is less). As at 30 April 2025, there were 5 recognised programmes with 21 approved applications; and
- (e) **Scholarship.** Full-time programmes at Level 5 of QF related to arboriculture and tree management are eligible. The level of scholarship is the total payable tuition fee or \$50,000 (whichever is less) for each academic year. As at 30 April 2025, there was 1 recognised programme with 1 approved application.

Since July 2020 (launch of SSS) and up to April 2025, 893 applications under SSS were approved (Note 10) and with total grants of \$10.6 million disbursed (representing 16% of the total expenditure of UFSF of \$64.8 million as at 30 April 2025).

### ***Scope for improvement in submitting applications by SSS programme providers***

3.4 The general procedures for processing applications and funding disbursements under SSS are as follows:

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**Note 10:** *As at 30 April 2025, of the 1,398 applications received since July 2020 (launch of SSS) and up to April 2025: (a) 893 (64%) applications were approved; (b) 29 (2%) applications were rejected; (c) 107 (8%) applications were withdrawn by the applicants before the completion of recognised programmes; and (d) 369 (26%) applications were yet to be processed (e.g. the applicants had not completed the programme and/or pending submission of application for funding disbursement from SSS programme providers).*

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- (a) ***Before the commencement of recognised programme (only applicable to Category (1), Category (2) and Scholarship programmes).*** Applicants shall submit initial applications to SSS programme providers directly before the commencement of recognised programme. Late applications would not be processed. After receiving the application forms from the applicants, SSS programme providers would then verify the information as well as the submitted supporting documents. Each SSS programme provider shall submit a consolidated list of applicants to DEVB within 1 month after the commencement of each recognised programme for advance information and budgeting purpose; and
  
- (b) ***After the completion of recognised programme/semester or successfully passing the assessment (applicable to all programme categories).*** SSS programme providers shall submit the funding disbursement applications within 4 months (for Category (1), Category (2) and Scholarship programmes) or within 1 year (for Category (3) and Category (4) programmes) from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters to DEVB for assessment. Successful applicants will be provided with study sponsorship and/or scholarship through reimbursement.

3.5 Audit examined the applications submitted by SSS programme providers from July 2020 to April 2025 and noted that there were some late submissions for Category (1), Category (2) and Scholarship programmes under SSS, as follows:

- (a) DEVB had not required SSS programme providers to provide the submission dates of initial applications by applicants and therefore whether the initial applications were submitted to SSS programme providers in a timely manner could not be ascertained;
  
- (b) of the 155 consolidated lists of applicants submitted by SSS programme providers, 26 (17%) were submitted more than 1 month from the commencement of each recognised programme, ranging from 32 to 137 days (averaging 60 days); and
  
- (c) for the 800 funding disbursement applications due for submission by SSS programme providers as at 30 April 2025 (i.e. the related recognised programmes were completed on or before 31 December 2024):

- (i) 767 funding disbursement applications had been submitted to DEVB and 70 (9%) of them were submitted more than 4 months from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters, ranging from 124 to 831 days (averaging 177 days); and
- (ii) 33 funding disbursement applications had not been submitted to DEVB, with time lapsed of more than 4 months from the completion dates of recognised programmes/semesters to 30 April 2025, ranging from 127 to 1,321 days (averaging 416 days).

According to DEVB, it had contacted the respective SSS programme providers from time to time to check on the status of outstanding cases mentioned above. The late submissions of funding disbursement applications by SSS programme providers were mainly due to the administrative procedures of individual providers, and the fact that some applicants (who failed the required assessments) had to retake the examinations within a specific timeframe.

3.6 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) require SSS programme providers to provide the submission dates of initial applications by applicants for monitoring purpose; and
- (b) take measures to ensure that SSS programme providers timely submit consolidated lists of applicants and funding disbursement applications in accordance with the stipulated timeframes and take follow-up actions on outstanding cases as appropriate (e.g. issuing reminder letters to SSS programme providers concerned).

### ***Scope for improvement in the processing of scholarship nominations***

3.7 Since its establishment, SSS has provided scholarships to attract calibrated students (i.e. students who attained 20 total grade points or above in his/her best five subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination) to undertake a recognised programme, and join the arboriculture and horticulture industry upon graduation. According to DEVB, effective from July 2023 (as an enhancement measure introduced after an internal review by DEVB in 2023

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(see para. 3.36(c)), the scholarship has been extended to benefit best-performing students in each academic year through nominations by the SSS programme provider, aiming to encourage more youngsters to enrol in the programme and achieve better academic performance.

3.8 DEVB has set out the following procedures for processing scholarship nominations by the SSS programme provider since May 2024:

- (a) before the commencement of each academic year, the SSS programme provider is required to develop its own selection criteria and mechanism to the satisfaction of DEVB, and DEVB will notify the SSS programme provider the quota for scholarship to be allocated for each academic year;
- (b) within 4 months from the end of each academic year, the SSS programme provider shall provide a list of nominated students selected (together with relevant supporting documents) according to the agreed selection criteria and mechanism for DEVB's consideration; and
- (c) DEVB shall process the scholarship nominations and disbursements within 3 months upon complete submission of the nomination list and relevant supporting documents by the SSS programme provider.

3.9 In this connection, Audit noted that:

- (a) regarding the scholarship nominations for the 2023/24 academic year, the SSS programme provider sought DEVB's advice on the quota in July 2024. According to DEVB, it had requested the SSS programme provider to provide the required information for determining the quota of nominations, and the required information was eventually received in February 2025. After reviewing the information received, DEVB notified the SSS programme provider in June 2025 that a quota of 6 scholarships would be granted. In the event, the SSS programme provider submitted the scholarship nomination list in July 2025 (i.e. about 1 year after the end of the 2023/24 academic year). In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that the scholarship nomination list was approved and the scholarships would be granted to the nominated students; and

- (b) regarding the scholarship nominations for the 2024/25 academic year, the SSS programme provider only submitted the selection criteria and mechanism for scholarship nominations to DEVB for agreement near the end of academic year (i.e. submitted in July 2025), at variance with the stipulated timeframe (i.e. before the commencement of academic year (see para. 3.8(a))), and such selection criteria and mechanism was approved by DEVB in September 2025.

3.10 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that:

- (a) the SSS programme provider submit the selection criteria and mechanism for scholarship nominations and the scholarship nomination list in accordance with the stipulated timeframes; and
- (b) the processing of scholarship nominations and disbursements is in accordance with the stipulated timeframes.

## **Audit recommendations**

3.11 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Development should:**

- (a) **require SSS programme providers to provide the submission dates of initial applications by applicants for monitoring purpose;**
- (b) **take measures to ensure that SSS programme providers timely submit consolidated lists of applicants and funding disbursement applications in accordance with the stipulated timeframes and take follow-up actions on outstanding cases as appropriate;**
- (c) **take measures to ensure that the SSS programme provider submit the selection criteria and mechanism for scholarship nominations and the scholarship nomination list in accordance with the stipulated timeframes; and**
- (d) **take measures to ensure that the processing of scholarship nominations and disbursements is in accordance with the stipulated timeframes.**

## **Response from the Government**

3.12 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that DEVB:

- (a) is updating guidelines to streamline the application process and setting up a monitoring mechanism to ensure timely submission of the required information by SSS programme providers;
- (b) will request SSS programme providers to submit regular returns on the list of planned programmes. Furthermore, DEVB is setting up a monitoring mechanism to track the submission progress and send reminders to SSS programme providers to ensure their timely submission of consolidated lists of applicants and funding disbursement applications in accordance with the stipulated timeframes;
- (c) has strengthened the monitoring mechanism and proactively followed up with the SSS programme provider to ensure its timely submission of the selection criteria and mechanism for scholarship nominations, and the scholarship nomination list in accordance with the stipulated timeframes; and
- (d) has strengthened the monitoring mechanism to ensure timely processing of scholarship nominations and disbursements in accordance with the stipulated timeframes.

## **Administration of the Trainee Programme**

3.13 TP enables graduates of arboriculture, tree management and tree work programmes at Level 3 to Level 5 of QF offered by local vocational, tertiary and training institutions (who do not possess any relevant professional qualifications) to receive on-the-job training for acquiring practical working experience to become qualified tree management personnel to support tree management and maintenance work in Hong Kong. A fixed sum of training allowance ranging from \$5,500 to \$6,500 per month (depending on the job category and training stage) would be provided to the trainees under TP through their employers during the training periods (ranging from 18 to 36 months), and a maximum bonus of \$34,000 would be granted to the trainees upon their completion of TP and/or acquisition of related

professional/training qualifications. TP has been open for application throughout the year since August 2020.

3.14 CIC was commissioned by DEVB to administer TP. In this partnership, DEVB provides technical steer to CIC in various areas (e.g. development of training achievement plans, and review of training and assessment materials). The general procedures for processing applications and funding disbursements under TP are as follows:

- (a) ***Trainee admitted by CIC under TP.*** Eligible employers shall first employ the trainee, and then submit the application of TP to CIC. Employers are required to arrange a qualified training tutor to provide structured on-the-job training to the trainee. During the training period, the employer shall first pay the trainee full monthly wage not less than the amount specified by CIC and then apply for reimbursement of training allowance from CIC. Upon the completion of TP and/or acquisition of related professional/training qualification, the trainee can apply for granting of bonus (which would be paid to him/her directly through CIC). Since August 2020 (launch of TP) and up to April 2025, 289 applications had been received, of which 237 applications were approved (Note 11); and
- (b) ***Trainee employed directly by DEVB under TP.*** Some trainees are employed directly by DEVB under TP and deployed to the tree management departments (hereinafter referred to as government trainees). For these government trainees, the staff costs are borne by DEVB (i.e. no reimbursement of training allowance from TP under UFSF). Except for the admission of government trainees, CIC is responsible for all other administrative work (e.g. monitoring training progress and processing bonus disbursements) under TP. From August 2020 to April 2025, a total of 46 government trainees (processed by 3 batches in 2021, 2023 and 2024 respectively) were employed by DEVB under TP.

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**Note 11:** *As at 30 April 2025, of the 289 trainee applications received by CIC under TP since August 2020 (launch of TP) and up to April 2025: (a) 237 (82%) applications were approved; (b) 18 (6%) applications were rejected; (c) 29 (10%) applications were withdrawn by the employers prior to approval/rejection; and (d) 5 (2%) applications were being processed.*

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From August 2020 to April 2025, there were 283 trainees admitted under TP, comprising 237 trainees admitted by CIC and 46 government trainees employed directly by DEVB. The total amount of training allowances and bonuses paid under TP were \$16.7 million (comprising training allowances of \$15.8 million and bonuses of \$0.8 million paid to the trainees admitted by CIC, and bonuses of \$0.1 million paid to the government trainees).

### ***Scope for improvement in commissioning the administrator of TP***

3.15 According to Financial Circular No. 2/2017 on management of funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government:

- (a) the Controlling Officer should observe the need to preserve a level playing field in government procurements and in partnering arrangements involving non-governmental entities, by adhering as far as possible to a fair, open and/or competitive selection process;
- (b) if the project is primarily owned, organised and funded by the Government, and the Controlling Officer needs to procure a service or good from a non-government/private sector partner, the Controlling Officer should generally follow an open, fair and competitive bidding process. If an exception is required, the Controlling Officer should seek separate approval from the Treasury Branch of the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau in accordance with the Stores and Procurement Regulations;
- (c) where the Controlling Officer is satisfied that the engagement of a non-government partner to administer the project does not constitute procurement of service or good and is not subject to the Stores and Procurement Regulations, the relevant considerations and decisions should be clearly and properly recorded; and
- (d) the Controlling Officer should agree with the non-government partner the key milestones to be achieved, the terms and conditions of the payments (including when and how payments would be made), and how progress is to be reported periodically for project monitoring.

3.16 *Lack of proper documentation for the considerations and decision that engaging CIC did not constitute a procurement of service.* CIC was directly commissioned by DEVB to administer TP under UFSF (Note 12). In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that:

- (a) TP aimed to offer on-the-job training to arboriculture and tree management graduates to acquire practical working experience, paving the way for qualified tree management personnel in the future;
- (b) it considered that the arrangement of directly commissioning CIC in administering TP was appropriate, having regard to CIC's focus on workers-level vocational training and rich experience in providing structured on-the-job programme in collaboration with contractors for various trades. Furthermore, the construction industry was also one of the major prospective employers of the graduates from TP; and
- (c) it had maintained a collaborative partnership with CIC. The engagement of CIC to administer TP under a partnering arrangement was not a procurement of service, and was not subject to the Stores and Procurement Regulations. Similar partnering arrangements had also been adopted for other programmes under the collaboration of DEVB and CIC, which also did not constitute procurement of services.

However, as far as could be ascertained, there was no documentation on the relevant considerations and decision that engaging CIC did not constitute a procurement of service. In Audit's view, in managing future funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government, DEVB needs to take measures to ensure that the requirements stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 are complied with, including maintaining proper documentation of all relevant considerations and decisions for the engagement of a non-government partner to administer the project.

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**Note 12:** *In May 2019, DEVB informed the Panel on Development that many arboriculture and landscape contractors were in the construction industry. In view of CIC's extensive experience in administering structured on-the-job training in collaboration with contractors for various trades in the construction industry, DEVB would commission CIC to administer TP.*

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3.17 *Formal agreement not entered into with CIC.* According to DEVB, CIC is responsible for developing training plan, liaising with employers, and carrying out certain administrative work under TP (including processing applications, monitoring training progress and processing training allowance reimbursements). Moreover, CIC is also responsible for formulating and implementing publicity and promotion activities for TP with the related costs borne by DEVB. In this connection, Audit noted that:

- (a) CIC commenced preparatory work for administering TP in April 2020 before the launch of TP in August 2020. However, DEVB did not enter into a formal agreement with CIC before the commencement of service. Up to August 2025, a formal agreement was still yet to be entered into;
- (b) in July 2021, CIC submitted a budget plan for TP (covering the period from 2020-21 to 2028-29) to DEVB setting out the following:
  - (i) the roles of CIC, and staff establishment and the recruitment proposals of the designated administration team under CIC to administer TP; and
  - (ii) the budget on the expenses incurred under TP, the calculation basis of the administration costs paid by the Government to CIC for administering TP, and the payment method.

DEVB accepted the budget plan in writing in July 2021, confirming the above arrangements; and

- (c) DEVB had monitored and assessed CIC's work through daily liaison and monthly meetings. While CIC had provided reporting materials covering training and promotion plans as well as data and analysis regarding the trainees under TP, some regular reporting materials such as updates to the budget plan, annual implementation plan and year-end report were not submitted.

3.18 In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that it had maintained close collaboration with CIC in the preparatory work for TP, and had agreed with CIC on the key features of the partnering arrangement. However, Audit considers the

situation undesirable that formal agreement has not been entered into with CIC. In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) enter into a formal agreement with CIC for administering TP as soon as possible, outlining key milestones to be achieved and the periodic reporting process for project monitoring (e.g. annual budget, annual implementation plan and year-end report submissions); and
- (b) in implementing future funding schemes with partnering arrangements with non-government partners, take measures to ensure that a formal agreement is entered into between the Government and the non-government partner before the commencement of service.

### *Need to review administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP*

3.19 According to DEVB:

- (a) CIC is the statutory industry body with one of its main functions to provide training courses for the construction industry using the income from the levy on construction works under the Construction Industry Council Ordinance (Cap. 587) and the Construction Workers Registration Ordinance (Cap. 583);
- (b) during initial discussions with CIC regarding the administration of TP, CIC indicated that there were limited spare resources to absorb the administration costs of TP. It was agreed between DEVB and CIC that the administration costs incurred by CIC at the initial stage of TP were covered by UFSF; and
- (c) the administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP (comprising a full recovery of direct staff costs for administering TP and indirect costs calculated as 30% of the direct staff costs) are met by TP of UFSF, and DEVB informed the Panel on Development such arrangement in May 2019. To safeguard the Government's financial interests, CIC is required to seek agreement from DEVB on any staff deployment in the administration team in a timely manner, and all the recruitment proposals should be approved by DEVB prior to employment.

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3.20 According to Financial Circular No. 2/2017, to facilitate financial control, the Controlling Officer should:

- (a) formulate a policy on whether (and under what circumstances) administrative overheads may be included in the project cost and charged to the grant, and whether there should be a ceiling (say, 15% of the project cost) for such. Exceptions are to be properly justified, recorded and accounted for; and
- (b) ensure that the administrative charges are reasonable and proportionate to the purpose, scale, nature and circumstances of a particular fund or project.

3.21 According to DEVB, it has been closely monitoring the expenses associated with TP (including the administration costs paid to CIC). For example, due to a lower-than-expected number of trainees admitted under TP, only 3 staff members were hired, instead of 4 as proposed by CIC in the budget plan submitted in July 2021 (see para. 3.17(b)(i)). However, Audit noted that, up to April 2025:

- (a) the total administration costs paid to CIC of \$8.7 million accounted for 32% of the total expenditure incurred for TP under UFSF of \$27.5 million (Note 13). According to DEVB, the level of administration costs paid to CIC was relatively high at the initial stage of TP, and it was expected that in the long run, the percentage would be decreased; and
- (b) DEVB had not set a ceiling (e.g. as a certain percentage of the total expenditure of TP) for the administration costs paid to CIC. As far as could be ascertained, there was no documentation showing the justifications for not setting a ceiling for the administration costs paid to CIC.

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**Note 13:** *The total expenditure incurred for TP under UFSF up to April 2025 was \$27.5 million, which comprised: (a) \$16.7 million (61%) for the training allowances and bonuses paid under TP; (b) \$8.7 million (32%) for the administration costs paid to CIC; and (c) \$2.1 million (7%) for other costs incurred by CIC (e.g. arranging enrichment programmes for trainees under TP and promotion for TP).*

3.22 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) keep under review the level of administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP and take measures to contain the administration costs (e.g. setting a ceiling for the administration costs and reviewing the manpower arrangement of CIC); and
- (b) in managing future funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government, take measures to ensure that the requirements stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 are complied with, including maintaining proper documentation of the justifications for not setting a ceiling for the administration costs paid to a non-government partner for administering the project.

***Need to monitor the processing time of TP applications***

3.23 According to the "Framework Document" issued by CIC (which sets out the application and monitoring procedures in administering TP), CIC would notify the employer of the application result within 15 working days upon receipt of a duly completed application form with all relevant and valid supporting documents.

3.24 Audit noted that DEVB had not required CIC to provide the dates of receipt of all relevant and valid supporting documents for monitoring the compliance with the 15-working-day timeframe. In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to monitor the compliance with the timeframe relating to processing of applications under TP, such as requiring CIC to provide the dates of receipt of all relevant and valid supporting documents from employers.

***Need to monitor the compliance with timeframes relating to funding disbursements under TP***

3.25 The "Framework Document" issued by CIC sets out the timeframes relating to funding disbursements under TP:

## **Urban Forestry Support Fund**

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- (a) ***Submission of application for reimbursement of training allowance.*** Employers are required to submit the application for reimbursement of training allowance within 12 months from the month in which the wage has been paid. Late applications would not be processed;
- (b) ***Submission of application for granting of bonus.*** Trainees are required to submit the application for granting of bonus within 6 months from the date of meeting the application requirements (e.g. acquisition of professional/training qualification). Late applications would not be processed; and
- (c) ***Settlement of payments of training allowance and bonus.*** Upon receipt of a duly completed application form with all valid supporting documents, CIC will settle the payment for reimbursement of training allowance or granting of bonus within 30 calendar days.

3.26 Audit noted that DEVB had not required CIC to provide information relating to the funding disbursements under TP for monitoring the compliance with the relevant timeframes as stipulated in the “Framework Document”. In Audit’s view, DEVB needs to take measures (e.g. requiring CIC to provide information relating to the funding disbursements) to monitor the compliance with the timeframes relating to funding disbursements under TP.

### ***Need to strengthen monitoring of CIC’s inspections on training progress of trainees under TP***

3.27 According to the “Framework Document” issued by CIC, to monitor the training progress of trainees and ensure that the training is properly conducted, CIC would conduct inspections (in the form of site inspection or video call interview) at least 3 times per year for each trainee (covering all trainees admitted under TP) within the training period. According to DEVB, findings and observations noted during inspections are recorded on inspection reports prepared by CIC staff.

3.28 Audit noted that, while findings and observations noted during inspections were recorded by CIC staff on inspection reports, DEVB had not required CIC to provide management information on the frequency of inspections for each trainee, and the nature and seriousness of findings and observations noted during inspections

for monitoring purpose. According to DEVB, as at 30 April 2025, of the 283 trainees admitted under TP, 144 trainees had completed at least 1 full year of training (Note 14). In this connection, Audit examined the frequency of CIC's inspections for these 144 trainees and found that CIC did not conduct at least 3 inspections per year within the training period for 77 (53%) trainees, not meeting the requirement stipulated in the "Framework Document".

3.29 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to strengthen monitoring of CIC's inspections on training progress of trainees under TP, such as requiring CIC to provide management information on the frequency of CIC's inspections, and findings and observations noted during inspections.

## **Audit recommendations**

3.30 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**

- (a) **in managing future funding schemes and non-works projects funded by the Government, take measures to ensure that the requirements stipulated in Financial Circular No. 2/2017 are complied with, including maintaining proper documentation of:**
  - (i) **all relevant considerations and decisions for the engagement of a non-government partner to administer the project; and**
  - (ii) **the justifications for not setting a ceiling for the administration costs paid to a non-government partner for administering the project;**
- (b) **enter into a formal agreement with CIC for administering TP as soon as possible, outlining key milestones to be achieved and the periodic reporting process for project monitoring;**

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**Note 14:** *The remaining 139 (283 minus 144) trainees admitted under TP were in the first year of training or dropped out during the first year of training.*

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- (c) **in implementing future funding schemes with partnering arrangements with non-government partners, take measures to ensure that a formal agreement is entered into between the Government and the non-government partner before the commencement of service;**
- (d) **keep under review the level of administration costs paid to CIC for administering TP and take measures to contain the administration costs (e.g. setting a ceiling for the administration costs and reviewing the manpower arrangement of CIC);**
- (e) **take measures to monitor the compliance with the timeframes relating to processing of applications and funding disbursements under TP; and**
- (f) **take measures to strengthen monitoring of CIC's inspections on training progress of trainees under TP, such as requiring CIC to provide management information on the frequency of CIC's inspections, and findings and observations noted during inspections.**

## **Response from the Government**

3.31 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB will ensure that proper documentation is maintained in future for compliance with the requirements set out in the Financial Circular;
- (b) although a formal agreement was not signed before CIC commenced the administrative work for TP, the key arrangements on administering TP was subsequently set out in a budget plan agreed between DEVB and CIC. DEVB is preparing a formal agreement with CIC to document the updated arrangements for better project monitoring;
- (c) DEVB will ensure that for future similar partnering arrangements, a formal agreement will be entered into before the commencement of service;

- (d) the level of administration costs paid to CIC was relatively high at the initial stage of TP due to the need to establish the administration team at CIC for preparatory work prior to the intake of trainees and the reimbursement of training allowances. It is expected that the percentage of administration costs in the total expenditure of TP will gradually decrease in the long run. DEVB is working with CIC to review the administration costs;
- (e) DEVB has set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure the compliance with the timeframes relating to processing of applications and funding disbursements under TP; and
- (f) DEVB has requested CIC to include additional management information in its regular reports to enhance the monitoring of progress and performance in the administration of TP.

## **Performance monitoring of the Urban Forestry Support Fund**

### ***Need to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP***

3.32 According to Financial Circular No. 2/2017, as a good practice, the Controlling Officer should consider developing and reporting on appropriate performance measures for the fund, preferably focusing on outcome-based targets. According to DEVB:

- (a) with the financial support from UFSF, graduates of SSS recognised programmes and trainees under TP could become qualified practitioners of the industry; and
- (b) it has set the annual target numbers of students/practitioners to be benefited from study sponsorship under SSS, students to be benefited from scholarship under SSS and trainees to be benefited from TP (hereinafter referred to as beneficiaries under SSS and TP).

3.33 Audit noted that there was scope for DEVB to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP, as follows:

## Urban Forestry Support Fund

- (a) **Levels of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP below targets.** According to DEVB, the annual target numbers of beneficiaries of study sponsorship under SSS, scholarship under SSS, and TP were 300, 9 and 100 respectively. However, Audit noted that the levels of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP were below targets. For the 4 years from 2021 to 2024, except for the study sponsorship under SSS in 2024, the actual numbers of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP were below the respective annual targets throughout the period (see Table 6);

**Table 6**

**Numbers of intakes of beneficiaries under SSS and TP  
(2021 to 2024)**

Year	Study sponsorship under SSS	Scholarship under SSS	TP
<b>Target number of intakes of beneficiaries</b>			
Annually	300	9	100
<b>Actual number of intakes of beneficiaries (Note)</b>			
2021	232	—	79
2022	114	1	43
2023	211	—	51
2024	415	—	69

Source: DEVB records

Note: Actual number of intakes of beneficiaries for 2020 is not shown in this Table as SSS and TP were open for application since July and August 2020 respectively.

- (b) **High withdrawal/drop-out rates under SSS/TP.** As at 30 April 2025:
- (i) from July 2020 (launch of SSS) to April 2025, of the 1,258 initial applications received under SSS before the commencement of recognised programmes, 106 (8%) initial applications were withdrawn by the applicants before the completion of recognised programmes; and

- (ii) from August 2020 (launch of TP) to April 2025, of the 283 trainees admitted under TP, 103 (36%) trainees dropped out and did not complete TP. According to DEVB, the main reasons for the drop-outs were related to the wage level and the nature of working environment in the private sector, and some trainees were offered permanent positions in the Government; and
  
- (c) ***Scope for improvement in conducting evaluation surveys on beneficiaries under SSS and TP.*** As at 30 April 2025, there were 893 and 58 beneficiaries who had completed SSS and TP respectively. According to DEVB, it has invited all beneficiaries under SSS and TP (upon their completion of SSS and TP) to complete evaluation surveys to collect feedbacks (e.g. beneficiaries' opinions, current employment status, and intentions to join/continue to work in the arboriculture and horticulture industry) to evaluate the effectiveness of SSS and TP. However, Audit noted that the response rates of the evaluation surveys were as follows:
  - (i) of the 893 graduates of SSS recognised programmes, only 37 (4%) of them returned the completed surveys; and
  
  - (ii) of the 58 trainees who had completed TP, 39 (67%) of them returned the completed surveys.

In Audit's view, DEVB needs to take measures to further evaluate (e.g. exploring measures to improve the response rates of evaluation surveys on beneficiaries under SSS and TP) and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP.

### ***Way forward of UFSF***

3.34 According to DEVB:

- (a) the objectives of UFSF are to encourage youngsters to join the arboriculture and horticulture industry, to uplift the professional standards of arboriculture and horticulture practitioners, and to strengthen public education and promotion on proper tree care (see para. 1.10); and
  
- (b) there are 4 initiatives under UFSF, namely SSS, TP, IUFCs, and public education and promotion campaigns to achieve the objectives.

## **Urban Forestry Support Fund**

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3.35 In this connection, Audit noted that, as at 30 April 2025 (i.e. after about 4.8 years since the launch of UFSF), only \$64.8 million (32%) of the \$200 million funding earmarked for UFSF was utilised. Of the \$64.8 million incurred:

- (a) \$38.1 million (59%) was incurred for SSS and TP. There is a need to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP (see para. 3.33);
- (b) \$8.4 million (13%) was incurred for 3 IUFCs (organised in 2020, 2022 and 2024) to provide a platform for the sharing of experience and expertise in tree management and conservation work among government authorities, professional bodies, academics and practitioners. According to DEVB, the 3 IUFCs achieved high attendance and positive feedbacks were received from participants; and
- (c) \$18.3 million (28%) was incurred for organising various publicity and promotion activities (e.g. participation in career expos, thematic guided tours, roving exhibitions and school reach-out events) to enhance public appreciation of trees and understanding of proper tree care and to raise youngsters' interest in arboriculture.

3.36 According to DEVB, it has been working closely with the arboriculture and horticulture industry to develop an adequate and quality workforce, as follows:

- (a) it commissioned a study on the arboriculture, horticulture and landscape management and maintenance industry in 2015 (completed in March 2017) to assess the training and supply of manpower against market demand. The study projected that there would be a shortage of tree management personnel in 2018 and showed the need to establish UFSF;
- (b) it commissioned another study on the arboriculture and horticulture industry in 2020 (completed in December 2021) to analyse the latest manpower situation of the industry. The study projected that the shortfall of manpower serving the industry would continue until 2023, and pointed out that there were aging problem and recruitment difficulties in the private sector of the arboriculture and horticulture industry;

- (c) with a view to further increasing the industry’s manpower and enhancing its capability, it also conducted an internal review on the implementation of SSS and TP in 2023, and introduced various enhancement measures to SSS and TP since July 2023. In particular, SSS was enhanced in July 2023 and June 2024 (e.g. extending the scopes of SSS) to attract more youngsters to join the arboriculture and horticulture industry, and encourage in-service practitioners to pursue continuing education. As a result, the number of intakes of students/practitioners for study sponsorship under SSS in 2024 exceeded the target number (see Table 6 in para. 3.33(a)). For TP, it has been reviewing and enhancing TP since 2023 in collaboration with representatives of the arboriculture and horticulture industry; and
- (d) another manpower study of the arboriculture and horticulture industry was commenced in July 2025, and is targeted for completion by March 2026.

3.37 In Audit’s view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) timely complete the manpower study of the arboriculture and horticulture industry; and
- (b) review the implementation of UFSF with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for UFSF, taking into account all relevant factors (e.g. manpower study results, operational experience gained from the implementation of UFSF in the past years, and latest development of the arboriculture and horticulture industry) and the audit observations and recommendations in this Audit Report.

## **Audit recommendations**

3.38 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**

- (a) **take measures to further evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of SSS and TP;**
- (b) **timely complete the manpower study of the arboriculture and horticulture industry; and**

- (c) **review the implementation of UFSF with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for UFSF, taking into account all relevant factors and the audit observations and recommendations in this Audit Report.**

## **Response from the Government**

3.39 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB has maintained active dialogue with industry stakeholders to gather feedback on the implementation of SSS and TP. DEVB will keep monitoring the effectiveness of SSS and TP, and take enhancement measures as appropriate;
- (b) DEVB is conducting the manpower study of the arboriculture and horticulture industry, which is scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2026; and
- (c) since the rollout of UFSF, DEVB has implemented enhancement measures over the years. DEVB will further review the implementation of UFSF and introduce enhancement measures as appropriate.

## **PART 4: REGISTRATION SCHEME AND OTHER ISSUES**

4.1 This PART examines RSTMP and other issues related to tree management, focusing on:

- (a) administration of RSTMP (paras. 4.2 to 4.19); and
- (b) other issues (paras. 4.20 to 4.26).

### **Administration of the Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel**

4.2 According to DEVB, RSTMP was launched on 1 December 2020 with the objectives of enhancing the professional quality of industry practitioners and improving the overall standard of tree works. Qualified in-service practitioners are encouraged to register as one or more of the five types of tree management personnel (i.e. arborists, tree risk assessors, tree work supervisors, tree climbers and chainsaw operators) under RSTMP on a voluntary basis. All government works and maintenance contracts with tender invitations issued on or after 1 December 2021 are required to engage tree management personnel registered under RSTMP in undertaking the respective types of tree-related works (Note 15).

4.3 According to DEVB, in general:

- (a) applicants should submit applications for registration under RSTMP using the e-forms or by post to DEVB, and may apply for registration for more than one personnel type under one or separate applications;

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**Note 15:** *According to DEVB, RSTMP is intended to regulate tree management personnel in government contracts and private sector. Government tree management staff are not required to register under RSTMP as they are considered as competent tree management personnel.*

## **Registration scheme and other issues**

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- (b) DEVB will check the application documents. Upon approval of application, an electronic registration card for each registered personnel type and a registration letter will be issued to the applicant; and
- (c) each registration of personnel type is valid for three years. Registered tree management personnel may apply for renewal of registration before expiry.

Since the launch of RSTMP in December 2020 and up to April 2025, DEVB had received 1,884 applications for registration and 318 applications for renewal of registration. As at 30 April 2025, there were 977 practitioners registered under RSTMP.

### ***Need to timely complete processing of applications***

4.4 The application notes (i.e. “Notes to Applicants” and “Notes to Registered Tree Management Personnel on Application for Renewal of Registration”) issued by DEVB set out the requirements and procedures of applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP. Audit examination noted that there was scope for improvement in processing the applications by DEVB.

4.5 ***Timeframe for notifying applicants of application results not met.*** According to the application notes, applicants will normally be notified of the application results for registration and renewal within 6 weeks (i.e. 42 days) upon receipt of duly completed application forms with all necessary supporting documents, or upon satisfactory verification of documents and/or receipt of supplementary information (hereinafter referred to as the receipt of required information). Audit noted that the timeframe for notifying applicants of application results was not met in some cases. As at 30 April 2025:

- (a) ***Applications for registration.*** Of the 1,884 applications for registration:
  - (i) 12 applications had been withdrawn by the applicants, and 45 applications were being processed and the notification timeframe was not yet due; and

- (ii) of the remaining 1,827 applications in which the applicants had been notified of the application results, the applicants of 138 (8%) applications were notified 43 days to 12 months (averaging 3 months) after the dates of receipt of required information; and
  
- (b) ***Applications for renewal of registration.*** Of the 318 applications for renewal of registration:
  - (i) 2 applications had been withdrawn by the applicants, and 36 applications were being processed and the notification timeframe was not yet due; and
  
  - (ii) of the remaining 280 applications in which the applicants had been notified of the application results, the applicants of 7 (3%) applications were notified 49 days to 9 months (averaging 4 months) after the dates of receipt of required information.

4.6 ***Long time taken in obtaining required information.*** The 6-week notification timeframe stipulated in the application notes is only applicable since the dates of receipt of required information. Audit noted that long time was taken in obtaining required information for some applications. As at 30 April 2025:

- (a) ***Applications for registration.*** Of the 1,827 processed applications, the applicants of 807 applications had provided supplementary information as required after submission of applications. The required information of 348 (43%) applications was provided by the applicants 43 days to 10 months (averaging 3 months) from the dates of application; and
  
- (b) ***Applications for renewal of registration.*** Of the 280 processed applications, the applicants of 95 applications had provided supplementary information as required after submission of applications. The required information of 50 (53%) applications was provided by the applicants 43 days to 11 months (averaging 4 months) from the dates of application (see Table 7).

**Table 7**

**Time taken in obtaining required information in processing applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP (30 April 2025)**

Time elapsed from the dates of application to the dates of receipt of required information	Number of processed applications	
	Applications for registration	Applications for renewal
6 weeks or less	459 (57%)	45 (47%)
More than 6 weeks to 3 months	217 (27%)	26 (27%)
More than 3 months to 6 months	115 (14%)	13 (14%)
More than 6 months to 11 months	16 (2%)	11 (12%)
Total	807 (100%)	95 (100%)

Source: DEVB records

4.7 According to DEVB:

- (a) following the launch of RSTMP in December 2020, DEVB has set up a dedicated website for the scheme. To facilitate applicants in making applications for registration and renewal, DEVB promulgated the “Application Strategy” and the “Highlights of Registration Renewal” on the website to help applicants better understand the registration and renewal requirements. When answering hotline enquiries, DEVB staff also provide detailed advice to the enquirers on the registration and renewal requirements;
- (b) when RSTMP was newly launched, there was a huge influx of applications for registration and most of the applicants were not familiar with the registration requirements. From January 2024 to April 2025, the applicants of all applications for registration had been notified of the application results within 42 days after the dates of receipt of required information; and

- (c) for the applications for registration that took a long time to obtain the required information for processing, in most cases the applicants did not have the required qualifications when they submitted the applications, and it took time for them to obtain the required qualifications. Regarding the applications for renewal of registration, some applicants submitted the applications to DEVB earlier than required in order to ascertain whether they had fulfilled the required number of hours for continuing education in arboriculture, and those who had not fulfilled the requirements needed time to complete the relevant courses.

4.8 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) make continued efforts to ensure that the applicants for registration and renewal under RSTMP are notified of the application results in accordance with the stipulated timeframes; and
- (b) take measures to ensure that the applicants timely submit the required information in processing applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP.

### *Late applications related to renewal of registration*

4.9 Each registration of personnel type under RSTMP is valid for three years. According to the application notes:

- (a) registered tree management personnel may apply for renewal of registration or extension of validity period of the current registration for 6 months. For both renewal of registration and extension of validity period, the application should be made at the earliest 6 months in advance of and at least 10 weeks before the expiry date of the current registration; and
- (b) if no application for renewal of registration is submitted before the expiry date (including the expiry date after extension, if applicable) or renewal requirements are not fulfilled, the registration will lapse and the personnel will be delisted. Once delisted from a specific personnel type, application for registration of the same personnel type can only be submitted again one year after the date of delisting.

## **Registration scheme and other issues**

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4.10 From December 2020 to April 2025, DEVB had received 318 applications for renewal of registrations (see para. 4.3), involving 755 registrations of personnel type. As at 30 April 2025, the processing for renewal of 650 (86%) registrations was completed (i.e. approved or rejected). Audit noted that some applications were submitted after the deadline (i.e. 10 weeks before the expiry date), as follows:

- (a) ***Applications for extension of validity period.*** The tree management personnel of 490 registrations had applied for extension of validity period and all were approved. Of these registrations, the applications of 97 (20%) registrations were submitted 2 to 91 days (averaging 38 days) after the deadline. Moreover, the applications of 7 (7%) of the 97 registrations were submitted 10 to 21 days (averaging 17 days) after the expiry dates of registration, but they were approved instead of being delisted; and
- (b) ***Applications for renewal of registration.*** The applications of 40 registrations were rejected as renewal requirements were not fulfilled. Of the remaining 610 registrations that were approved, the applications of 206 (34%) registrations were submitted 1 to 101 days (averaging 40 days) after the deadline. Moreover, the applications of 4 (2%) of the 206 registrations were submitted 2 to 31 days (averaging 21 days) after the expiry dates of registration, but they were approved instead of being delisted.

4.11 According to DEVB:

- (a) the applicants had provided valid reasons for the delay in submitting applications or valid explanations on the need for the extra time to meet all the renewal requirements;
- (b) to promote registration under RSTMP by the practitioners, DEVB had exercised discretion in processing the late applications for extension of validity period and renewal of registration after considering the validity of reasons and explanations provided by the applicants; and

- (c) measures have been put in place to remind the registered tree management personnel to submit extension or renewal applications, such as issuing email reminders 6 and 3 months before the expiry of registration, and giving phone calls if no extension or renewal application is received.

4.12 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to keep monitoring the timeliness of submission of applications related to renewal of registration under RSTMP by the registered tree management personnel and take follow-up actions as appropriate.

### ***Timeframes for handling complaints made against registered tree management personnel not met***

4.13 DEVB guidelines set out the handling mechanism for complaints made against registered tree management personnel, as follows:

- (a) upon receipt of a complaint, DEVB would collect information for preliminary investigation, and decide to refuse the complaint (i.e. not to pursue the complaint) or refer the complaint to the Disciplinary Panel (consisting of three members from stakeholders of the arboriculture and horticulture industry) for consideration;
- (b) the processing of a refused complaint should be completed (i.e. notifying the complainant, registered tree management personnel and/or other relevant parties of the results) within 2 months from the date of receipt; and
- (c) for complaints referred to the Disciplinary Panel, the Disciplinary Panel would review the cases and, if necessary, make recommendations on appropriate disciplinary actions (e.g. issue of warning letters, posting a public reprimand, and suspension or termination of registrations) against the registered tree management personnel (Note 16). The processing of a referred complaint should be completed within 4 months from the date of receipt.

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**Note 16:** *Appeals can be submitted to the Appeal Board (consisting of three members from stakeholders of the arboriculture and horticulture industry) and the decision of the Appeal Board is final.*

## **Registration scheme and other issues**

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4.14 From December 2020 to April 2025, DEVB had received 10 complaints made against registered tree management personnel. Audit noted that the timeframes for handling such complaints were not met in some cases. Of the 10 complaints:

- (a) 7 complaints were refused, of which 3 (43%) were completed more than 2 to 6 months (averaging 4 months) from the dates of receipt; and
- (b) 3 complaints were referred to the Disciplinary Panel, of which 2 (67%) were completed more than 4 to 6 months (averaging 5 months) from the dates of receipt (Note 17).

4.15 According to DEVB, more time was needed by the complainants to provide supplementary information for thorough investigation of the complaints. In Audit's view, DEVB needs to review the timeframes for handling complaints made against registered tree management personnel and take measures to ensure that the complaints are timely handled.

### ***Way forward of RSTMP***

4.16 According to DEVB, sufficient manpower and adequate capability of arboriculture practitioners are important for minimising tree failure risks, and RSTMP is launched to uplift the standard of the in-service arboriculture practitioners. DEVB would also review RSTMP as and when necessary and adjust the implementation arrangements in the best interest of both the industry and the public. DEVB has also collaborated closely with industry stakeholders and practitioners to gather feedback on RSTMP. For example, enhancement measures to the registration and renewal requirements under RSTMP were implemented in February 2024. Audit noted that:

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**Note 17:** *According to DEVB, disciplinary actions had been imposed on 4 registered tree management personnel in these 3 complaints, in which an advisory letter, a warning letter and a public reprimand were issued to 3 of the 4 registered tree management personnel respectively, and all the registrations of the remaining personnel were terminated (i.e. delisted from the register).*

- (a) ***Mandatory registration scheme.*** Prior to the launch of RSTMP, DEVB conducted a survey among the practitioners to gauge the views of the industry. According to the survey, half of the respondents supported a voluntary scheme as a start and a mandatory scheme in the long term. Since the launch of RSTMP in December 2020 and up to April 2025, DEVB had not conducted any similar surveys regarding the implementation of a mandatory registration scheme;
  
- (b) ***Local professional assessments and trade tests.*** In July 2020, DEVB informed LegCo that there was a need to develop local professional assessments and trade tests under RSTMP to specify competence standards and performance criteria, assess competence and skills of in-service practitioners with the same yardsticks, and serve as the recognised local professional qualifications. In March 2023, DEVB had completed a study for developing the relevant requirements. As at 30 April 2025, the local professional assessments and trade tests had not yet been incorporated into RSTMP. According to DEVB, a manpower study of the arboriculture and horticulture industry was commenced in July 2025 for completion by March 2026, which will provide more information on the current status of registered practitioners in the market; and
  
- (c) ***Tree management on private land.*** To promote proper management of trees on private land, DEVB published the Handbook on Tree Management in April 2016. While RSTMP was launched in December 2020, it had not yet been incorporated into the Handbook for reference by the private property owners as at 30 April 2025.

4.17 As at 30 April 2025, RSTMP had been launched for more than four years since December 2020. In Audit's view, DEVB needs to review the implementation of RSTMP with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for RSTMP, taking into account all relevant factors (e.g. the views of the industry on a mandatory scheme in the long term, the need for local professional assessments and trade tests, and the number of tree failure incidents involving trees on private land) and the audit observations and recommendations in this Audit Report.

## **Audit recommendations**

- 4.18 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**
- (a) **make continued efforts to ensure that the applicants for registration and renewal under RSTMP are notified of the application results in accordance with the stipulated timeframes;**
  - (b) **take measures to ensure that the applicants timely submit the required information in processing applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP;**
  - (c) **keep monitoring the timeliness of submission of applications related to renewal of registration under RSTMP by the registered tree management personnel and take follow-up actions as appropriate;**
  - (d) **review the timeframes for handling complaints made against registered tree management personnel and take measures to ensure that the complaints are timely handled; and**
  - (e) **review the implementation of RSTMP with a view to formulating further enhancement measures for RSTMP, taking into account all relevant factors and the audit observations and recommendations in this Audit Report.**

## **Response from the Government**

4.19 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB has implemented a tracking mechanism to monitor the handling time of applications, so as to ensure timely notifications of application results to applicants;
- (b) DEVB is updating internal guidelines and “Notes to Applicants” to set out the timeframes for processing applications for registration and renewal under RSTMP;

- (c) DEVB is updating internal guidelines and “Notes to Applicants” to refine the timeframes on submissions of applications related to renewal of registration under RSTMP;
- (d) DEVB is updating internal guidelines and “Complaint Form” to refine the timeframes for handling complaints; and
- (e) since the rollout of RSTMP, DEVB has maintained active dialogue with industry stakeholders to gather feedback on implementation of the scheme and introduced enhancement measures over the years. DEVB will further review the implementation of RSTMP and introduce enhancement measures as appropriate.

### Other issues

#### *Scope for improvement in adoption of new technology in tree management work*

4.20 According to DEVB, the adoption of applicable technology in tree management provides useful aids in monitoring the health and structure of trees, and tracking their changes and anomalies. One of the technologies is the use of tilt sensors to determine and monitor the structural stability of the trees by analysing the tilting angles. Audit noted that:

- (a) in August 2021, DEVB launched a three-year study programme to collect and analyse the tree movement data captured by tilt sensors installed on 8,000 trees, with a view to exploring the effectiveness of the sensors in identifying trees at risk of collapse in advance;
- (b) in January 2023, in reporting the observations of the Task Force on Roadside Tree Planting and Maintenance (see para. 2.18(c)) to the Panel on Development, DEVB recommended more extensive use of technology in tree management, including considering extending the use of tilt sensors having regard to the findings of the study ending in 2024; and

## **Registration scheme and other issues**

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- (c) in August 2024, the study on tilt sensors was completed (Note 18). According to the study report, the monitoring system with tilt sensors was proven to be a valuable tool and it was recommended to expand the sensor network. As at 30 April 2025, the tilt sensors installed on the 8,000 trees deployed in the study were not in use and no tilt sensors were installed on more trees.

4.21 In October 2025, DEVB informed Audit that:

- (a) it had encouraged tree management departments to adopt the technology of tilt sensors in their tree management work; and
- (b) it had been considering further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work.

4.22 In Audit's view, DEVB needs to:

- (a) further encourage tree management departments to adopt new technology (e.g. the tilt sensors) in tree management work; and
- (b) expedite the consideration of further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work.

### ***Need to strengthen the checking of statistics related to tree management work for reporting purposes***

4.23 Audit noted that some statistics related to tree management work of DEVB reported to LegCo were not accurate, as follows:

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**Note 18:** *According to DEVB, the total expenditure involved in the three-year study on tilt sensors was \$14.8 million, which was funded by the recurrent expenditure of DEVB.*

- (a) ***Tree inspection reports audited by TMO.*** Tree inspection reports submitted by the tree management departments will be selected by TMO for audit (see para. 2.10). According to DEVB records, TMO had audited 2,384 and 2,309 tree inspection reports for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 TRAM cycles respectively, of which 409 and 336 were with irregularities identified respectively. However, in response to the question about the number of tree inspection reports audited and the number of reports with irregularities identified for the 2019-20 to 2021-22 TRAM cycles raised by a LegCo Member in examining the 2023-24 Estimates of Expenditure, DEVB informed LegCo that 2,258 (i.e. a shortfall of 126) and 2,205 (i.e. a shortfall of 104) reports were audited for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 TRAM cycles respectively, of which 362 (i.e. a shortfall of 47) and 307 (i.e. a shortfall of 29) were with irregularities identified respectively; and
  
- (b) ***Tree failure incidents reported to TMO.*** TMO maintained a tree failure register to record all the reports on tree failure incidents received (see para. 2.25(a)). According to the tree failure register, there were 481 tree failure incidents reported to TMO in 2023. However, in response to the questions about the numbers of tree failure incidents in each of the previous five years raised by a LegCo Member in examining the 2024-25 and 2025-26 Estimates of Expenditure, DEVB informed LegCo that there were 383 tree failure incidents reported to TMO in 2023 (i.e. a shortfall of 98 incidents).

4.24 According to DEVB:

- (a) for the numbers related to the audit of tree inspection reports, only those of core tree management departments were included in the numbers provided in the reply (i.e. those of non-core tree management departments were not included); and
  
- (b) for the number of tree failure incidents, the inconsistency between TMO's tree failure register and the reply was due to the categorisation of maintenance party of trees involved in tree failure incidents in recent years.

In Audit's view, DEVB needs to strengthen the checking of statistics related to tree management work for reporting purposes.

## **Audit recommendations**

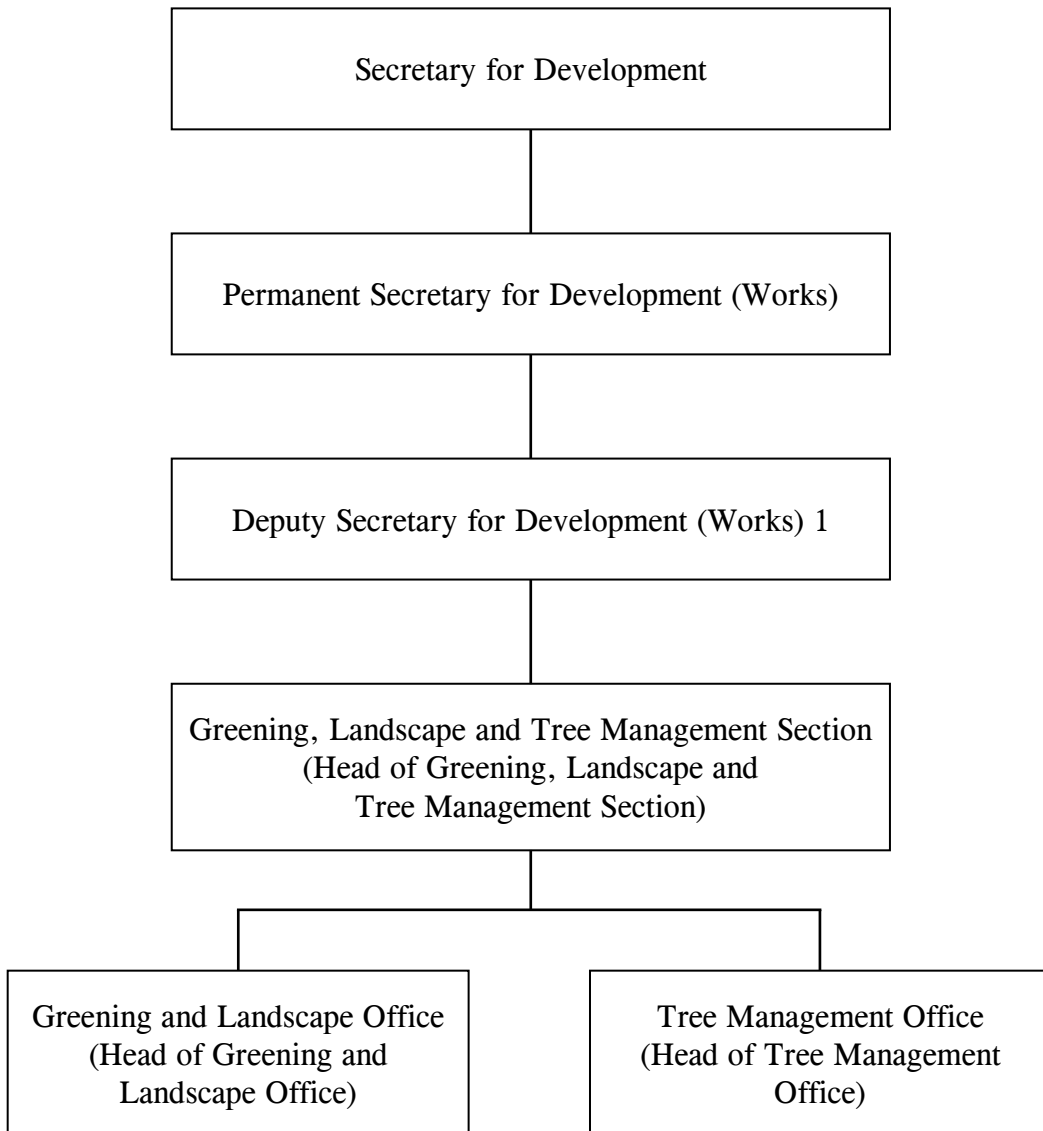
- 4.25 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Development should:**
- (a) **further encourage tree management departments to adopt new technology (e.g. the tilt sensors) in tree management work, and expedite the consideration of further studying the integration of the tilt sensors and other advanced technologies in tree management work; and**
  - (b) **strengthen the checking of statistics related to tree management work for reporting purposes.**

## **Response from the Government**

4.26 The Secretary for Development agrees with the audit recommendations. She has said that:

- (a) DEVB has been encouraging tree management departments to adopt advanced technologies by providing appropriate training and experience sharing sessions, and collaborating with tertiary institutions to explore new technologies for integration into tree management work. DEVB will continue with such efforts; and
- (b) DEVB has reminded colleagues to be more attentive when reporting statistics related to tree management work.

**Development Bureau:  
Organisation chart (extract)  
(30 April 2025)**



*Source: DEVB records*

**Acronyms and abbreviations**

AFCD	Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
Audit	Audit Commission
CIC	Construction Industry Council
DEVB	Development Bureau
GLO	Greening and Landscape Office
GLTMS	Greening, Landscape and Tree Management Section
IUFCs	International Urban Forestry Conferences
LandsD	Lands Department
LegCo	Legislative Council
QF	Qualifications Framework
RSTMP	Registration Scheme for Tree Management Personnel
SSS	Study Sponsorship Scheme
TMCP	Tree Management Common Platform
TMO	Tree Management Office
TP	Trainee Programme
TRAM	Tree risk assessment and management
UFSF	Urban Forestry Support Fund
UUGL	Unleased and unallocated government land