

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)109

(Question Serial No. 0068)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Donald NG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

With regard to the processing of liquor licence applications, please advise this Committee of the following:

- 1) How many applications for new issue and renewal of liquor licence were there in 2025? How many liquor licences were granted?
- 2) How many of these new issue and renewal applications were not approved? What are the reasons?
- 3) For unsuccessful cases where an appeal was lodged, how many were eventually granted a licence?
- 4) Will the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department consider implementing measures to further shorten the processing time? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?
- 5) Please provide the manpower and expenditure involved in vetting liquor licence applications.
- 6) There are opinions that the current requirements for the grant of a liquor licence are too stringent. For examples, a person may hold a licence for only one premises, and the licensee is required to be present on the premises. If the licensee is on leave, though he may apply to appoint another person to stand in, deployment of staff may be difficult due to manpower shortage. If the licensee resigns, it may create a vacuum where no one is holding the liquor licence, thereby affecting the operation of the premises and failing to meet the customers' needs. In this connection, will the Department consider reviewing and relaxing the requirements for the grant of a liquor licence? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon LEUNG Chun, Jonathan (LegCo internal reference no.: 6)

Reply:

- 1) The information sought is as follows:

	2025
Application for new issue of liquor licence	986 (including 10 club liquor licences)

	2025
Application for renewal of liquor licence	6 032 (including 221 club liquor licences)
Liquor licence issued*	7 470 (including 236 club liquor licences)

* Including those cases with applications submitted before 2025 and licences issued in 2025.

2) The information sought is as follows:

Unsuccessful application	Number	Reason
New issue	1	- The applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold the licence - The grant of licence would be contrary to public interest
Renewal	3	- The applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold the licence - The grant of licence would be contrary to public interest

3) The information sought is as follows:

Unsuccessful application	Appeal lodged for unsuccessful application	Number of cases approved after successful appeal
New issue	0	0
Renewal	1	The appeal case was heard in a meeting of the Municipal Services Appeals Board (MSAB) on 5 March 2026, and is currently pending for the decision and announcement of MSAB.

4) Regarding the current application for new issue and renewal of liquor licences, apart from the submission of required documents by applicants, review and consultation with the relevant departments are also required before the Liquor Licensing Board (LLB) can grant an approval, so as to ensure that the decision made complies with the relevant regulations and meets the public interest. Generally, if the documents are fully submitted and the application is non-contested, the average processing time for an application for new issue of liquor licence is about 40 to 45 working days, while an application for renewal takes about 35 to 40 working days.

The LLB, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department acting as the LLB Secretariat and the relevant departments have been committed to improve the efficiency of the vetting and approval work. To continuously optimise the licensing process, the Department reviews the relevant vetting and approval procedures from time to time and, after considering the opinions from the trade, has implemented various trade facilitation measures, including that licensees may submit renewal applications between 3 and 4 months prior to the expiry of liquor licence to allow sufficient time for processing; the maximum duration of a liquor licence is up to 2 years to reduce the frequency for renewal; applicants may submit application forms electronically, which is more

convenient than submitting a hard copy; and renewal notices are issued to the licensees/applicants by short message service and email notifications for their timely follow-up.

The Department will continue to closely monitor the views of the trade and the actual processing time of each kind of applications. Under the premise of maintaining a stringent standard for licence approval to protect public interest and facilitating business, the Department will actively explore feasible enhancement measures to cater for the needs of the society and the trade.

- 5) The Department has 9 staff working at the LLB Secretariat and 40 in the 3 Liquor Licensing Offices under its purview. They are responsible for assisting the LLB in handling liquor licence and club liquor licence applications. Some of them also carry out administrative and clerical work of other licences. The total revised estimated expenditure in 2025-26 was \$14.78 million.
- 6) The Dutiable Commodities (Liquor) Regulations (Cap. 109B) stipulate that a liquor licence should only be issued to a “fit and proper person”. The provision concerned requires that a liquor licence shall be held by a “natural person” who will fulfil his legal and administrative responsibilities. Thus, it is a condition for licensing that licensees must personally supervise the operation of the premises.

As the sudden departure of the liquor licensee may cause disruption to the liquor selling business operator, the LLB has, after considering the opinions of the trade, implemented the Reserve Licensee Mechanism since March 2017. By allowing the business operator to identify and nominate at an early stage a suitable person as a reserve licensee to perform the duties of the licensee where necessary, this trade facilitation measure helps minimise disruption due to the sudden departure of the liquor licensee.

In addition, the LLB has set up a mechanism since July 2017 to handle cases that departed licensees refuse to transfer the licences for different reasons. Given that the business operators provide documents of proof, they can apply for transfer of the liquor licences even without the consent of the current liquor licensees. No submission of a new application for liquor licence is needed.

The Department will continue to keep a close eye on the opinions of the trade and actively explore further enhancement measures.

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