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\$18.7m spent on building⁷⁻⁶ watch

An estimated \$18.7 million would be spent in the next fiscal year for the continued monitoring of structurally dangerous buildings in the territory.

The sum comprised about 25 per cent of the Building Ordinance Office's budgeted expenditure for the next financial year, the Director of Building Development, Mr Chamson Chau, said.

He said the BOO has also budgeted \$27 million, or 36 per cent of its total estimated \$74.7 million, for keeping a close watch on new buildings.

As for illegal works on buildings, Mr Chau said the department will launch a publicity campaign this fiscal year aimed at discouraging the public from carrying out illegal additions on buildings.

He also anticipated that there would be no additional staff in the Architectural Office, despite the recent rebound in the property market and the increase in the number of new buildings.

In his reply to Unofficials' queries on spending on consultancy fees, Mr Chau said there was no direct comparison on whether there would be a saving if some jobs were done by in-house staff rather than obtaining professional work from consultants.

He said consultants were usually commissioned for feasibility studies and other professional services for which the department lacked resources, expertise and manpower.

However, in-house staff would also be appointed to manage and keep frequent contacts with consultants to ensure the job would meet the required standard.

Generally, he said, it would be more costly to get professional services from consultants but in most cases the need for expertise in some areas, such as in the Architectural Office, would be inevitable due to a shortage of staff.