

LCQ18: Municipal solid waste charging

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (June 5):

Question:

It has been reported that in response to municipal solid waste charging (MSW charging), of which the implementation was originally intended for April 1 and subsequently deferred to August 1 this year, the management fees of quite a number of single-block buildings and large-scale housing estates in Hong Kong have been substantially increased, hence adding to the expenditure burden on members of the public. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of buildings and housing estates across the territory where the management fees have been pre-emptively adjusted upwards in response to MSW charging; if so, of the details; if not, whether it will expeditiously compile such statistics;

(2) whether it has made any prediction on the number of buildings and housing estates among those mentioned in (1) where the management fees will and will not be restored to the original levels once the Government shelves MSW charging;

(3) amid allegations that MSW charging is "ill-considered", "a pointless endeavour", and causing nuisance to the public (adding to their burden even before implementation), whether the authorities will consider advising the owners' committees and owners' corporations of the buildings and housing estates where additional management fees have been pre-emptively charged in response to MSW charging that they should appropriately adjust the management fees downwards; and

(4) whether the Government will consider an appropriate downward adjustment to rates, partial payment of Government rent, or introduction of other financial support measures as a means to alleviate the expenditure burden on those members of the public who have to pay extra management fees as a result of MSW charging?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Paul Tse is as follows:

The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration announced at the joint meeting of the Panel on Environmental Affairs and Panel on Food Safety and

Environmental Hygiene of the Legislative Council on May 27, 2024 that the implementation of municipal solid waste (MSW) charging on August 1, 2024 would be suspended, and a series of work would be pursued in the meantime, including the enhancement of recycling support, strengthening of public education and publicity, as well as a review on how to enhance the MSW charging scheme. The Government would keep in view the progress of various work and assess the level of participation of the public towards reducing MSW.

We note that some members of the public have expressed concerns towards the raising of property management fee by their property management companies (PMCs) on the grounds of implementing MSW charging. The Property Management Services Authority (PMSA) issued a notice to all licensed PMCs (www.pmsa.org.hk/en/press-release/20240126) on January 26, 2024 reminding them to explain to the owners' organisations, owners and clients, in accordance with the "General Code of Conduct" issued by the PMSA, how the handling fee relevant to MSW charging for the residents to be charged is calculated, including the specific disposal arrangements, the fee elements involved, and the fee needs to be paid to third parties (e.g. cleansing service contractors) if applicable, in order to facilitate the owners' organisations, owners and clients to understand the matter and make decisions on the implementation arrangements. The PMSA also reminded PMCs that, if property management fee is to be adjusted due to various reasons, they should explain the adjustment clearly to the owners' organisations, owners and clients in accordance with the "General Code of Conduct" to avoid misunderstandings.

Following the suspension of MSW charging, the PMSA has issued another notice (www.pmsa.org.hk/en/press-release/20240527) to all the licensed PMCs on May 27, 2024, reminding them that if the preparation for MSW charging was one of the factors for adjusting the property management fee, following the suspension of the implementation, the owners' organisations, owners, and clients and the PMCs should discuss together on whether any corresponding adjustment should be made, or whether the increased fee should be transferred to the management fund to cover future repair and maintenance, or be retained for future implementation of MSW charging, or be refunded to the residents. The PMSA encourages PMCs to consult owners' organisations, owners and clients to address these issues and provide appropriate and clear explanations accordingly.