

LCQ3: Regulating food trade

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 24):

Question:

One of the functions of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is to regulate the food trade, including issuing licences to food premises and inspecting such premises. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of inspections of licensed food premises conducted by the FEHD last year, with a breakdown by type of premises;

(2) of the respective numbers of the various types of food business licences which are valid at present;

(3) of the respective numbers of applications for transfer of food business licences received and approved by the FEHD last year; and

(4) of the respective numbers of cases, found by the FEHD when conducting the inspections mentioned in (1), in which the premises concerned (a) were not open for business (among such cases, the respective numbers of premises which were not open (i) for the reason that they were under renovation and (ii) for other reasons (not including those premises which had been asked to close for business by the Government due to the epidemic)), and (b) had changed owners but approval had not been given for the relevant applications for licence transfer; if such figures are unavailable, whether it has plans to compile relevant statistics; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In accordance with the regulations under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), including the Food Business Regulation (Cap. 132X), the Frozen Confections Regulation (Cap. 132AC) and the Milk Regulation (Cap. 132AQ), every person who carries on any food business shall obtain a relevant licence from the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). In addition, any person who intends to operate food business for the sale of restricted food shall obtain a permit relevant to the proposed business before commencement of such business. All food premises holding licences or permits issued by the FEHD are subject to the regulation of the FEHD, and a licensee or permittee must obtain the FEHD's approval before transferring the licence or permit to any other person. Health inspectorate officers of the FEHD adopt a risk-based approach in conducting inspections to licensed food premises, with a view to safeguarding food safety and environmental hygiene.

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) and (4) The FEHD conducted over 207 000 inspections to licensed and permitted food premises in 2020. The department does not have separate breakdown figures on the inspections by types of premises, the number of licensed food premises which were not open for business during the inspections, and the number of premises which had changed owners prior to obtaining approvals for the relevant applications for licence transfer. The FEHD is planning to enhance the existing Licensing Management Information System and input the inspection records by electronic means, which are expected to be introduced progressively starting from the end of 2022.

(2) There are 31 475 valid food business licences as of January 2021. Breakdown by licence types is set out at Annex.

(3) Last year, the FEHD received 1 413 applications for transfer of food business licence, 1 396 of which had been approved.