

## LCQ5: Making good use of government properties and lands

Following is a question by the Hon Lau Kwok-fan and a reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr James Lau, in the Legislative Council today (April 3):

Question:

It has been reported that there are currently quite a number of government properties located in the urban areas which have, for years, been left vacant or put to temporary uses only, which appears to be a waste of precious land resources. For instance, the former Mong Kok Market has all along been used for temporary storage only since it was closed nine years ago. On the other hand, non-government organizations currently may apply for lease of certain vacant government sites under short-term tenancies (STTs) for community, institutional or other non-profit-making uses. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the address and gross floor area of each government property in the urban area which is currently vacant or used for temporary storage and has a gross floor area of over 1 000 square feet, as well as the duration for which the property has been left in such a state (set out such information in a table); given that the Government has proposed in the Budget of this financial year an allocation of \$20 billion for the purchase of 60 properties for the provision of additional welfare facilities, whether the Government had considered using the government properties just mentioned for welfare facilities before it made such a proposal; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether, in the long run, the Government has plans to convert the government properties mentioned in (1) to welfare, transitional housing or other public uses, so as to put them to optimal uses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the respective numbers of applications for lease of vacant government sites under STTs received and approved by the Government so far; the average processing time for each approved application, and whether it has reviewed the effectiveness of the relevant measures; if so, of the details?

Reply:

Acting President,

Government properties are primarily used as offices for government departments and for the provision of public services. Departments responsible for the management of the properties should ensure that the properties are put to optimal use. When the properties become surplus to their operational needs, the managing departments should release the properties for use by

other government departments, lease out the properties through commercialisation or open the properties for use by non-government organisations (NGOs) in accordance with the established mechanism.

Having consulted the Development Bureau (DEVB), Education Bureau (EDB), Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), Government Property Agency (GPA) and Housing Department (HD), the consolidated reply of the Government to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (2) Vacant government properties can be broadly classified into school premises and non-school premises.

According to the information from EDB, as at end-February 2019, there were five vacant school premises (VSP) under EDB's purview which were government premises located in urban areas. These VSP are earmarked or retained for school or other educational uses. Information on the address, site area and the year of ceasing operation of these VSP is set out in Annex I. Under the prevailing central clearing house mechanism in handling VSP, once EDB confirms that the VSP are no longer required by EDB for reallocation for school use, EDB would inform the Planning Department (PlanD) and other relevant departments (such as the Lands Department (LandsD) and HD) for PlanD's consideration of suitable alternative long-term uses.

For non-school premises, according to the information provided by the relevant departments to GPA, the vacant government properties surplus to the Government's operational needs, with a total floor area of over 100 square metres (m<sup>2</sup>) and located in urban areas are set out in Annex II. Information of the properties that provide a total floor area of over 100 m<sup>2</sup>, located in urban area and used for storage is at Annex III.

Departments are required to review the government properties under their management from time to time, with a view to ensuring the optimal utilisation of the properties. If a government property is no longer required for its original use, the managing department would first review if the property could be deployed to meet other needs of itself. If in the negative, the department may seek GPA's assistance in identifying other user departments. If it is confirmed that the property is surplus to the operational needs of the Government, the managing department may, with the assistance of GPA, lease out the property through commercialisation, or open the property for use by NGOs, or disposal of the properties by sale. In the course of switching the use of properties, the managing department should continue to manage and make good use of the properties (such as arranging temporary use (e.g. storage)) as far as possible.

In addition to internal review by departments, GPA also initiates regular reviews on the properties and sites managed by departments. GPA also suggests ways for departments to enhance the utilisation of the properties (e.g. converting a resource room into a multi-purpose facility). Where circumstances permit, GPA will also study with the relevant departments including PlanD the possibility of releasing the sites for other suitable uses through re-provisioning the existing offices or facilities. Relevant departments will keep the use of the properties and sites in the annexes

under review, including consideration of various public use such as welfare and housing.

In future, the Government will adopt a more proactive attitude and co-ordinated approach through the multi-storey development under the "single site, multiple use" principle to consolidate and provide more "Government, Institution or Community" facilities on under-utilised government sites, in order to maximise the potential of these sites and provide more community facilities.

Regarding the planning of social welfare facilities and services, the Government has all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach for the provision of welfare facilities. These include identifying suitable government premises and sites such as VSP by LWB / Social Welfare Department; imposing requirements of the construction of welfare facilities in land sale conditions where feasible; and acquiring premises for the provision of welfare facilities as a short-term strategy.

(3) The list of vacant government sites (including vacant school premises) managed by LandsD and available for application by NGOs or social enterprises for use by short-term tenancy (STT) is published on the Government's GeoInfo Map web page ([www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/search/faci/\\_\\_\\_VGS?lg=en](http://www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/search/faci/___VGS?lg=en)). As far as vacant built premises are concerned, no VSP currently on the list are located in the urban area. In the past four financial years (up to the end of January 2019 for 2018-19), LandsD received around 90 applications for these sites in total. In the same period, LandsD approved 16 such STTs (Note 1). The processing time will depend on the nature and complexity of issues involved, while the processing of most applications can be completed within one to two years. LandsD will, where practicable and appropriate, continue to arrange suitable temporary uses for sites pending implementation of long-term development uses to optimise the utilisation of land resources, including uploading information of the vacant sites to the Internet for application by interested organisations. At the execution level, LandsD will continue to keep in view the processing of applications, and suitably review and improve as and when necessary.

In order to assist NGOs in using vacant government sites, a \$1 billion non-recurrent commitment was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in January this year for setting up a funding scheme to support NGOs in using vacant government sites and restoring school premises for various short-term uses that are beneficial to the community. DEVB has started inviting funding applications.

Thank you, Acting President.

Note 1: As the processing of applications received during a year may not be completed within the same year, the application cases approved during the year may not correspond with the application cases received during the year.