

LCQ5: Office accommodation for RTHK

Following is a question by the Hon Alvin Yeung and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (June 3):

Question:

It has been reported that the Education Bureau (EDB) last month requested the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) to vacate and hand back the Education Television Centre at Broadcast Drive by September this year. Besides, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation has planned to resume the premises located in the InnoCentre at Tat Chee Avenue which is currently used as the office of the General Programmes Section of RTHK's Television Division. In January 2014, the Public Works Subcommittee of this Council voted down the proposal to upgrade to Category A the project to construct the New Broadcasting House of Radio Television Hong Kong (BH). In November 2017, the Government indicated that the project had been downgraded from Category B to Category C, but such an adjustment would not affect RTHK from continuing to explore feasible options, including the exploration with the relevant Government departments the feasibility of constructing a joint-user building, and RTHK would take forward the BH project in accordance with the established mechanism. Regarding the office accommodation for RTHK, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the progress of the BH project; whether it will expeditiously upgrade the project to Category B and, at the same time, accord a higher priority to the project, as well as provide RTHK with additional funding to meet the expenditure on renting new offices before the completion and commissioning of the BH;
- (2) as RTHK has over the years been the sole user department of the Education Television Centre, whether EDB will defer the resumption of the facility, or grant the site concerned to RTHK by way of temporary government land allocation until the commissioning of the BH; and
- (3) as the Government has repeatedly stated in recent months that RTHK must fully abide by the Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong and duly fulfil the obligations as a public service broadcaster, whether it has assessed if the decision to resume the above premises will hinder the fulfilment of such obligations by RTHK, including meeting the target number of hours of programme output for the current financial year?

Reply:

President,

As a government department, the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) has been allocated sufficient resources under established mechanism for providing

public service broadcasting. Our reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Member, prepared in consultation with the Education Bureau (EDB) and relevant departments, is as follows:

(1) As for the New Broadcasting House (New BH) project, the Government submitted to the Legislative Council (LegCo) Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) on December 18, 2013 a funding application of \$6 billion for the construction of the New BH in Tseung Kwan O. However, the application was negated at the PWSC meeting on January 3, 2014. Subsequently, the Government reduced the cost to \$5.3 billion in response to the request of the PWSC. Unfortunately, consensus could not be reached among Members after rounds of communications. Hence, the Government informed the PWSC on January 29, 2014 that it would not submit the revised funding application to the PWSC for another discussion.

Having regard to the views of the LegCo, operational needs of RTHK and the need to ensure that the reserved site would have better economic benefits, the Government has been proactively taking forward the construction of the new BH on the basis of a joint-user building. With the assistance of the Architectural Services Department, RTHK is discussing with departments which are interested in the joint-user building on their respective requirements, as well as project design and planning. RTHK will continue to take forward the New BH project in accordance with the established mechanism.

RTHK currently uses different government properties as offices and for programme production purpose. RTHK also rents other properties subject to its operational needs, and the expenditure involved is met by existing resources. Meanwhile, RTHK will continue to step up maintenance and repairs, and take measures to improve the facilities and working environment of the buildings located at the Broadcast Drive, with a view to coping with operational needs.

(2) The Educational Television Centre (ETC) at 79 Broadcast Drive has all along been owned by EDB for the purpose of producing school educational television (ETV) programmes. Since the commissioning of ETC, EDB staff have all along been working in ETC, and RTHK is not the sole user department. During and before the financial year 2019-2020, RTHK was responsible for producing ETV programmes for EDB. To facilitate programme production, EDB has thus shared the use of its ETC with RTHK.

Following the change in mode of production of ETV programmes in light of the recommendations made in the Director of Audit's Report No. 71 published in October 2018, RTHK is no longer required to produce 62 ETV programmes for EDB every year. RTHK posts responsible for production of ETV programmes have also lapsed in this financial year. It can be seen that the original purpose and service need for RTHK staff to use ETC no longer exists. There is also a need for office accommodation within EDB arising from the continuous development of its own services in recent years. Hence, EDB has recently informed RTHK, requesting RTHK to move out from ETC under EDB by September this year.

EDB will continue to discuss with RTHK on the arrangement and timetable of moving out in order to meet the operational needs of both parties.

(3) RTHK expects that the re-provisioning of offices and production facilities at InnoCentre and ETC has no impact on programme production. RTHK has sufficient resources and equipment for providing public service broadcasting to fulfil the public purposes and mission under the Charter of RTHK.