

LCQ6: Land resources of public markets

â€‹Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (August 18):

Question:

It has been reported that the spaces of disused staff quarters in certain public markets (e.g. the quarters with an area of over 4 600 square feet in Tsuen Wan Market) under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) have been left vacant or converted into storage for many years. Moreover, the spaces in Tsuen King Circuit Market, which was closed in March 2018, have henceforth been used as storage or left vacant. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of disused quarters located in the markets under the FEHD, and set out by name of market the relevant information, including their addresses, floor areas, for how long they had been disused and current uses;

(2) when the Government will decide on the long-term use of the space of the disused quarters in Tsuen Wan Market and that of the closed Tsuen King Circuit Market; and

(3) whether it conducted in the past three years, and will conduct in the coming three years, tender exercises to let out the spaces of disused quarters inside markets and the closed markets to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at a nominal rent for use as offices or activity venues; if it did or will conduct tender exercises, of the details (including whether selective tender or open tender was or will be adopted, as well as the reasons for that and the timetable); if not, whether it will allocate such land resources to interested NGOs (e.g. grassroots associations) in order to make good use of such land resources; if so, of the relevant application procedure as well as the terms and conditions; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

To ensure optimal use of resources, the FEHD is required to follow the established mechanism on management of government properties in handling disused quarters. According to the mechanism, generally speaking, government properties should primarily be for government uses. Therefore, the FEHD will first consider redeploying disused quarters units for other internal uses, and if no suitable internal uses have been identified, assistance will be sought from the Government Property Agency (GPA) to identify and allocate the properties for use by other government departments. As disused quarters were mostly built decades ago, their overall design, fire service installation,

fire escapes, barrier-free access, etc. may not meet the prevailing statutory or required safety standards, and should therefore be handled case by case. Disused quarters units in public markets under the FEHD have been redeployed for other uses such as offices of government departments or storage to meet operational needs.

When a market is closed or consolidated and the premises or floor(s) are surplus to the FEHD's operational needs, such premises or floor(s) will be handled in accordance with the established procedures of the Government. Depending on the circumstances, the FEHD will seek views from the relevant departments, including the GPA, the Planning Department and the Lands Department, to formulate proposals for putting the premises or sites to gainful long-term uses.

In consultation with the relevant bureaux and departments, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Han-pan is as follows:

(1) At present, there are 52 disused quarters units in ten public markets under the FEHD. The address, floor area, year of closure and current use of these disused quarters units in public markets are detailed at Annex.

(2) There are 13 quarters units with a total area of about 500 square metres on the third and fourth floors of the Tsuen Wan Market, all of which have been disused as staff quarters since 2019. The FEHD has, in accordance with the established mechanism on management of government properties, converted these properties for other uses so as to meet the operational needs of the FEHD and the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency.

In March 2021, the Policy Innovation and Co-ordination Office (PICO) received from a social welfare organisation (SWO) a proposal to use the ex-FEHD quarters units on the fourth floor of the Tsuen Wan Market for implementing a pilot project to provide additional living space for subdivided unit households in Tsuen Wan, including providing those in need with space for cooking, doing laundry, studying and carrying out other community activities. Given that Tsuen Wan is one of the districts with the most subdivided unit households and that the pilot project could offer them substantive assistance to alleviate their daily living problems, the PICO considered it a worthy cause and immediately initiated internal co-ordination. After discussion with the PICO, the FEHD plans to hand over the above properties to the PICO for leasing to the SWO at a nominal rent for an initial period of five years. The target is to launch the service in the fourth quarter of 2021 so as to benefit the subdivided unit households in Tsuen Wan as soon as possible.

As regards the Tsuen King Circuit Market which was closed in March 2018, having ascertained that there is no need to retain the property for other uses, the FEHD has sought the GPA's assistance in accordance with the established procedures to identify other government departments to make optimal use of the property. The property is currently allocated for storage use at the request of the user departments. The long-term use of the Tsuen

King Circuit Market is still under consideration. The relevant bureaux and departments will consult the stakeholders in due course once a concrete plan is in place.

(3) The FEHD has all along been handling disused market quarters and closed markets in accordance with the established mechanism of the Government. If it is confirmed that a property is surplus to the operational needs of the Government, it may be leased out through a commercial approach or open for leasing application by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). An NGO who is interested to lease such surplus government accommodation can apply to the relevant policy bureaux or departments.

To optimise the use of our precious land resources, the FEHD will continue to follow the established mechanism on management of government properties in handling disused market quarters and upon closure or consolidation of markets.