

LCQ8: Compensation and rehousing arrangement for households affected by housing development in Wang Chau

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 3):

Question:

To take forward the Wang Chau public housing development (Phase 1) in Yuen Long, the Government needs to carry out land resumption work at three villages (i.e. Wing Ning Tsuen, Fung Chi Tsuen and Yeung Uk San Tsuen). Some affected villagers have sought my assistance, saying that while they have been informed by the Government that land resumption will be carried out in mid-July this year, the relevant compensation, rehousing and rehabilitation arrangements have not yet been properly handled. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of households in the aforesaid three villages who have not been rehoused and the reasons for that; whether it will expedite the relevant work, including properly rehousing residents who have not been allocated public rental housing units;

(2) of the number of villagers in the three villages who have applied for rehabilitation and, among them, the number of those whose eligibility has been verified; whether it will expedite the relevant work; and

(3) whether the Government can undertake that it will complete the compensation and rehousing work for all registered households in the three villages before carrying out the land resumption work in mid-July; how the Government will deal with those households who have not moved out when it carries out the land resumption work?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Alice Mak is as follows:

The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the funding for the site formation and infrastructure works for the project of Wang Chau Public Housing Development Phase 1 in March 2020. Subsequently, the Lands Department (LandsD) posted notices on April 15, 2020 in accordance with the Land (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance, notifying households and other occupants within the works area to leave structures and government land being occupied by them before July 15, 2020. According to the pre-clearance survey

conducted by the LandsD on October 30, 2015, a total of 250 households (including cases of split households) were affected by the Wang Chau housing project.

According to the information provided by the LandsD, 126 eligible households have been rehoused and 14 eligible households were being allocated with rehousing flats as at mid-May 2020. Another 30 households have opted not for rehousing but for applying ex-gratia allowances for permitted occupiers, of which 25 households have been verified to be eligible for the allowances, while the remaining five households have yet submitted the necessary information for eligibility vetting, despite repeated invitations by the LandsD. The remaining 80 households were found not eligible for rehousing due to reasons including the households owning residential properties in Hong Kong; the structures occupied by the households being unauthorised structures (including structures that were not registered in the 1982 Squatter Structure Survey and structures that were not licensed) and households being existing tenants of public rental housing or enjoying or have once enjoyed benefits under subsidised home ownership schemes or related benefits. Among these households, 14 households have moved out and 15 households are applying for agricultural resite with their identity as farmers with the LandsD. All households covered in the pre-clearance survey will be offered a domestic removal allowance, irrespective of their eligibility for rehousing and compensation. Generally speaking, the Government has to ensure reasonable and equitable use of public resources while taking care of the households affected by any development clearance. The LandsD will, in collaboration with relevant departments, continue to adopt a "people-oriented" approach and offer appropriate assistance to those in need as far as practicable. For example, the LandsD will, with consent from the relevant persons, refer cases with personal or family welfare needs to the Social Welfare Department for follow-up, explore with the clients the use of other feasible means to resolve their housing needs, and consider recommending compassionate rehousing for cases who, owing to their social and medical needs under specific circumstances, have no other feasible means to solve their housing needs.

For the affected farmers, if they lived in a surveyed squatter or a licensed structure affected by the works when the pre-clearance survey was conducted, they may apply for agricultural resite with the LandsD in respect of their structures affected, so that they can build a house and continue farming on private agricultural land they have secured elsewhere. When processing resite applications, the LandsD will consult the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and relevant departments. After confirming the applicants' eligibility and feasibility of their farming proposals, the LandsD will, subject to no objections from departments concerned, consider issuing the land owners a short-term waiver, allowing the construction of a domestic structure of prescribed dimensions (consisting of two storeys, with a maximum height of 5.18 metres/17 feet, and a maximum roofed-over area of 37.16 square metres/400 square feet) on the private agricultural land. Farmers with agricultural resite applications approved are not entitled to any other rehousing arrangements.

As for the agricultural resite arrangements, according to the record of the LandsD, 37 applications were received as at mid-May 2020. Among them, three applications have been withdrawn by the applicants, while one application was rejected since the applicant has been rehoused. The LandsD is processing the remaining 33 applications, and inspecting the applicants' farming operations and considering the submitted information together with the AFCD. The farmer status of four applicants has been preliminarily confirmed. Among these four applicants, the AFCD has accepted the proposal on continuing farming operations submitted by one of them and the LandsD is now processing the corresponding application for a short-term waiver. The LandsD has also written to the other three applicants requesting the submission of proposals on continuing farming operations. After inspections by the LandsD and AFCD, the LandsD is reviewing another 16 applications and is awaiting the submission of further information from 10 of the applicants (including proof of residing in the surveyed squatters at the time of the pre-clearance survey, years of farming operations and other supplementary information). The LandsD is arranging site inspections for the remaining 13 applications (including six new applications received between April and May 2020), with a view to verifying their farming operations and eligibility. The LandsD will continue to maintain close communication with these applicants, and process their applications as soon as possible.