

LCQ9: Development of hawker economy

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Environment and Ecology, Mr Tse Chin-wan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

There are views that the hawker economy is one of the cultural characteristics of Hong Kong, and hawker areas are signature spots for tourists to take photographs and "check-in" as well as iconic tourist spots in Hong Kong, while at the same time providing the gateway for members of the public to start their small businesses. However, the hawker management policy of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) is more from the municipal perspective of performing regulatory and enforcement duties. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of complaints in respect of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and licensed itinerant hawkers received by the Government in 2018, 2022 and last year, with a tabulated breakdown by type of complaints;

(2) as some licensed itinerant hawkers have relayed that upon receipt of complaints about obstruction, the FEHD usually handles such cases by driving the hawkers away, and these hawkers can only switch from hawking on streets with high pedestrian flow to hawking on side streets with low pedestrian flow, which is extremely unfavourable to their business operation, what measures the Government has put in place to ensure that they have a reasonable business environment;

(3) given that according to the information on the FEHD's webpage, one of the objectives of the hawker management policy is to reduce on-street hawking activities of licensed hawkers, whether the Government has considered reviewing the policy objective more from the perspectives of cultural, tourism and economic values as well as adjusting the policy, so as to facilitate the development of the hawker economy; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) of the respective numbers of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and licensed itinerant hawkers as at September 30 this year, with a tabulated breakdown by age distribution (i.e. aged 18 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, 60 to 69, 70 to 79, and 80 and above); and

(5) as there are views pointing out that while Hong Kong's economy is recovering at present, shop rents remain exorbitant and some owners have even increased rents against the market trend, leading to persistently high start-up costs for members of the public, whether the Government has plans to introduce a new licensing scheme for fixed-pitch hawkers or adjust the existing licencing requirements, so as to enable more members of the public to start up their own businesses through operating hawker pitches; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The community has very different views and expectations on hawkers and their on-street hawking activities. The Government has to strike a balance between the varying views and expectations, allowing licensed hawkers to operate according to market demand, while ensuring environmental hygiene, food safety and public safety and minimising nuisance to local residents etc. Having consulted the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB), my reply to the Hon Kwok Wai-keung's question is as follows:

(1) The number of complaints in respect of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and licensed itinerant hawkers received by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) in 2018, 2022 and 2023 are set out at Annex I. The complaints were mainly related to street obstruction, environmental hygiene nuisance and other licence-related issues. The FEHD does not maintain a breakdown of the complaints by type.

(2) and (5) Hong Kong is densely populated. On-street trading by licensed itinerant hawkers at locations of high pedestrian flow may cause obstruction and environmental nuisance, or even hygiene and fire risks. When taking enforcement actions, FEHD will, according to actual circumstances, balance the operational needs of hawkers and the rights of other street users as well as nearby residents. Fixed hawker pitches or hawker bazaars tend to cause less disturbance and are easier to manage. To provide licensed itinerant hawkers the option to move into and operate in a fixed hawker pitch or hawker bazaars, the FEHD will at times open up vacant fixed hawker pitches for re-allocation. This will also provide opportunity for other eligible members of the public to join the hawking trade. In 2019 and 2022, the FEHD released a total of 540 vacant fixed hawker pitches for re-allocation, and 523 new fixed pitch hawker licences have been issued so far.

(3) From the perspective of cultural and tourism policy, according to the CSTB, tourism is everywhere in Hong Kong, and any place can become a tourist attraction. There is already established mechanism to regulate licensed hawkers, and by balancing the needs of various parties and complying with relevant policy objectives and regulations, it is believed that they can attract tourists' patronage.

(4) As at September 30, 2024, the number of licensed fixed-pitch hawkers and itinerant hawkers as well as their age distribution are set out in Annex II.