

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)087

(Question Serial No. 2016)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (3) Market Management and Hawker Control

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

Please advise on the following:

- (a) the manpower and expenditure involved in developing proposals to improve the operating environment of public markets in each of the past three years; and
- (b) while it is stated that the Department will “take action to close the public markets which are under-utilised”, whether it has considered and explored the possibility of revitalising and transforming these markets; if yes, the manpower and expenditure involved and the details of such efforts made each year; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon CHAN Han-pan (Member Question No. 17)

Reply:

Due to demographic changes, new development/redevelopment projects and competition from other fresh provision outlets, the appeal of some public markets has diminished thus leading to reduced patronage and high vacancy rates. When assessing the viability of such markets and considering whether they are to be closed, we will look into a host of factors, including vacancy rate, prospects for improvement, availability of alternative sources of fresh provision outlets in the vicinity, the likely cost-effectiveness of upgrading works and the views of the relevant district councils etc. Where a market is closed and the premises is no longer required by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department), the vacated building space will be handled according to established procedures. The Government Property Agency may be requested to assist in identifying other government departments to put the premises to gainful long-term use. If the premises is by itself a stand-alone building, the Planning Department or the Lands Department may be involved in exploring the long term alternative use of the premises.

In the past three years, one market, viz. Bridges Street Market (the Market) was closed due to consistently high vacancy rate. The Market has been included into the “Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme” under which non-profit-making

non-government organizations are invited to submit proposals to revitalise government owned historic buildings. Looking ahead, we shall continue to work with relevant Bureaux/Departments and district councils on identification of public markets that may be closed.

Closure of public markets is only one of the options to deal with under-utilised markets. As an on-going initiative, the Department conducts promotional activities to enhance the patronage of public markets. These include thematic exhibitions and workshops, festive celebration activities, display of multi-language recipes as well as publication of booklets and quarterly newsletters to provide updated market information. In addition, the Department will let out long-standing vacant stalls at reduced upset auction prices and introduce more service trade stalls to enhance the occupancy rate of public markets.

Furthermore, in addition to regular maintenance and daily management of markets, the Department carries out improvement works in relevant markets to enhance their operating environment. The works may include improvement to the drainage, ventilation, lighting, fire services, signage, replacement of floor tiles, refurbishment of toilets and provision of barrier free access.

The expenditure involved in improvement projects completed and market promotional activities pursued in the past three years to enhance the operating environment of public markets is set out as follows -

| Year | Expenditure on market improvement projects (\$million) | Expenditure on market promotional activities (\$million) |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 2012-13 | 5.1 | 4 |
| 2013-14 | 22.2 | 4 |
| 2014-15 (Revised estimate) | 9.5 | 4 |

- End -