

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)090

(Question Serial No. 0686)

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:

It is stated that the Department will “take action to close public markets which are under-utilised.” In this connection, please provide information on the following:

- (a) the current utilisation rate of each public market in the territory; the definition of “under-utilised”; the criteria for setting the defined standard;
- (b) the uses of the premises concerned after closure of these public markets and the estimated expenditure involved; and
- (c) whether the Department will consider changing the uses of these public markets or stalls and re-letting them to other market traders or small business operators; if yes, the details and the estimated expenditure involved; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Member Question No. 30)

Reply:

The information sought is provided as follows –

- (a) 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 reduce patronage and high vacancy rates. When assessing the viability of such markets and considering whether they are to be closed, we will look at 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.
- (b) 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.

- (c) 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 introduced 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

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