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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 8 May 2007**

Nuisances caused by the Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse

Purpose

This paper summarises the discussions by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene (FSEH Panel) relating to nuisances caused by the Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse (TWSH).

Background

2. In 1979, the Government granted the TWSH site to a private company by a special-purpose lease for slaughtering operation. The site, with an area of one hectare, had a typhoon shelter along the whole of the western frontage, a cemetery at the eastern frontage and an oil depot to the north. The lease term has subsequently been extended to 30 June 2047.

3. TWSH commenced operation in 1983. Following the relocation of abattoirs in Kennedy Town, Yuen Long and Cheung Sha Wan to the Sheung Shui Slaughterhouse (SSSH), TWSH is the only licensed slaughterhouse located in a densely populated urban area. There is a residential development, Riviera Gardens, located about 120 meters from TWSH. The problem of odour and noise nuisances generated by TWSH has been a subject of complaint for a long time. The issue has been included in the agenda of almost every meeting between Legislative Council (LegCo) Members and the Tsuen Wan District Council (TWDC) members over the past few years.

4. Members attending the meetings with TWDC members held on 23 May 2002, 23 January 2003 and 9 November 2006 agreed to refer the matter to the FSEH Panel for follow up.

Views of TWDC

5. TWDC conducted a consultancy study on TWSH and published the final report in May 2002. The salient points in the report are listed below -

- (a) compared with the modern facilities in SSSH, such as the fully air-conditioned slaughter hall, fully mechanised slaughtering lines and mechanised carcass unloading facilities, the existing facilities in TWSH are outdated and insufficient to reduce and counter the environmental pollution generated by its operation;
- (b) the proposed options of strengthening inspection of TWSH, providing more mitigation measures, introducing an enclosed and nuisance containing system and installing shielding and screening structures, will only provide short-term solutions to the environmental problems caused by TWSH; and
- (c) the Administration should consider relocating TWSH as it is the most comprehensive and long-term solution to solve the odour problem.

6. Apart from expressing concern about the environmental nuisance caused by the operation of TWSH at their previous meetings with LegCo Members, TWDC members were also concerned about the possible transmission of Japanese Encephalitis (JE) by mosquitoes in the community. They considered that the Administration should apply the same set of licensing requirements for both TWSH and SSSH so as to alleviate the environmental nuisances caused by TWSH. TWDC members were of the view that the nuisances caused by TWSH were the result of the Administration's wrong decision in town planning. They suggested that the Administration should consider relocating TWSH and explore the feasibility of centralising slaughtering operation of livestock at SSSH.

Discussions by the FSEH Panel

7. The FSEH Panel held two meetings with the Administration on 28 October 2003 and 29 June 2004 to discuss issues relating to TWSH. The issues raised are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Measures to reduce nuisances caused by TWSH

8. The Administration advised the FSEH Panel that the TWSH management had implemented a number of improvement measures to reduce the odour and noise emissions from the slaughtering operation of TWSH as follows -

- (a) pre-washing all live pigs imported from the Mainland in SSSH before delivery to TWSH;

- (b) hosing down livestock within 15 minutes from unloading at TWSH to reduce odour;
- (c) cleansing the reception area after each and every unloading of pigs;
- (d) cleansing all lairages at least eight times daily;
- (e) cleansing the slaughter hall, meat despatch bank and waste storage areas immediately after each shift of operation;
- (f) covering a major proportion of the open apertures facing the Riviera Gardens to reduce the impact of noise and odour emissions;
- (g) closing all windows facing the Riviera Gardens during slaughtering hours; and
- (h) diverting the transportation route of livestock delivery lorries away from the Riviera Gardens.

9. According to the Administration, following the advice of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD), TWSH management had taken additional improvement measures to further reduce the generation of odour, noise and water pollutants including installation of windows at selected openings of lairages facing the Riviera Gardens, use of bleaching powder during cleansing operation at the slaughterhouse to reduce odour and installation of pedal-controlled hosing system in cleaning slaughtered pig carcasses to reduce the generation of waste water.

10. Some Panel members suggested other mitigation measures such as installing shielding and screening structures and planting scented trees in the vicinity of TWSH. The Administration, however, explained that, due to the "open" type of design of TWSH, it was not possible to install odour control equipment in TWSH as in the case of SSSH. The Administration stressed that the improvement measures implemented by TWSH management were effective and the levels of odour and noise generated from TWSH operation were within statutory limits.

11. Panel members queried whether the design of TWSH could meet the current hygiene and environmental standards. The Administration pointed out that, as TWSH was opened in 1983, its design was not as up-to-date as SSSH which came into operation in 1999. Though the licensing conditions for TWSH and SSSH were not the same because of their different designs and facilities, the same set of hygiene and environmental protection requirements were applied to these two slaughterhouses.

Relocation of TWSH and centralising of slaughtering livestock at SSSH

12. On the relocation of TWSH as the long-term solution to the problem, the Administration advised the FSEH Panel that the feasibility of centralising slaughtering operation of livestock at SSSH had also been raised in the Director of Audit's Report No. 36 "Provision of Slaughtering Facilities for Supplying Fresh Meat" issued in March 2001. FEHD had undertaken to conduct a forecasting exercise on the slaughtering throughput of livestock in the territory for the coming years up to 2010. Based on the outcome of the forecasting exercise, FEHD would decide on the need for a detailed study to ascertain the feasibility of centralising the slaughtering operation of livestock at SSSH.

13. Panel members were also concerned about the financial implications of relocating TWSH or of centralising the slaughtering operation of livestock at SSSH. Mr Tommy CHEUNG pointed out that the issue had been fully deliberated by the two former municipal councils which concluded that there was a need to retain a second slaughterhouse in order to safeguard against unforeseen situations and to ensure a stable supply of fresh meat. In his view, the relocation of TWSH should not be initiated by the Administration as it was operated by a private company. Mr WONG Yung-kan considered that, before further pursuing the issue, it would be prudent for the Administration to ascertain the intention of the TWSH management and the implications of relocating TWSH.

14. Mr Fred LI and Mr Albert CHAN, however, expressed the view that, if there was a case to retain two slaughterhouses in the territory, the Administration should reprovision TWSH in a less densely populated area in order to solve the problem of nuisances caused by TWSH which had been bothering nearby residents for years. Mr CHAN considered that the Administration had made a wrong decision in town planning. He pointed out that TWSH was already in operation when the development of the Riviera Gardens was approved.

15. The Administration responded that it had not undertaken an assessment on the proposed relocation of TWSH given that the improvement measures taken by the TWSH management had been satisfactory. The Administration would study the feasibility of centralising the slaughtering operation of livestock at SSSH on the basis of the result of the forecasting exercise. As TWSH was owned and operated by a private company, the Administration would have to compensate the operator for relocating TWSH. According to the Administration's information provided to the FSEH Panel, when the land was sold to Tsuen Wan Slaughter House Limited through an open tender on 27 January 1979, the land use was classified as "special purpose lease". In accordance with the lease guidelines, unless the lot is used for purposes other than that specified in the original tender or is resumed for other public purposes, the lessee may rightfully expect that his lease can be extended. Therefore, approval has been granted for the lease to be extended to 30 June 2047. The lease does not provide for its early termination by the Administration. If the removal or closure of TWSH was required for other public purposes before the expiration of the lease, the operator would be entitled to statutory compensation under the relevant ordinance.

16. On the town planning issue, according to the information provided by the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau, there is a piece of Government land (now vacant) used earlier by the Police Force as a vehicle pound and an elevated portion of Tsing Tsuen Road dividing the Riviera Gardens from TWSH. The Town Planning Board had taken the reasonable buffer between the slaughterhouse and the development into consideration when approving the Riviera Gardens development scheme in 1983.

Forecasting exercise on the slaughtering throughput of livestock

17. On 29 June 2004, the Administration briefed the FSEH Panel on the outcome of the forecasting study on the slaughtering throughput of livestock in Hong Kong in the coming years. The Panel noted that the study showed decreasing trends of the average consumption of fresh pork and beef per person, which resulted in the decline of the daily number of pigs and cattle slaughtered in the coming few years. Panel members were concerned with whether the decreasing number of pigs and cattle slaughtered was caused by the rising consumption of chilled pork and frozen food. The Administration responded that it could be caused by several factors such as price, improvement in the rearing of livestock which increased the proportion of meat in pig/cattle, availability of other food choices and slaughtering of more large pigs than medium and small pigs.

18. The Administration also advised that the findings were being examined by Architectural Services Department (ASD) for ascertaining the technical feasibility of centralising the slaughtering operations at SSSH. The Administration would consider the way forward after studying ASD's assessment and would report to the Panel in due course.

Latest developments

19. In response to the concern about the environmental nuisances caused by TWSH, FEHD has recently advised the LegCo Secretariat that, according to the findings of EPD, the odour and noise arising from the operation of TWSH is well maintained within statutory limits. Regarding the control and prevention of JE, FEHD staff has conducted anti-JE vector work at areas within 100-metre radius of pig farms and slaughterhouses once per week. In addition, staff working in slaughterhouses is monitoring the situation closely to ensure the slaughterhouse management has taken positive steps to eliminate potential breeding places. FEHD has also conducted a comprehensive review of the situation and would require the TWSH management to upgrade the facilities and provision through the imposition of additional licensing conditions.

20. The Administration will further brief the Panel on 8 May 2007 on the control of environmental nuisances caused by the operation of TWSH.

Relevant papers

21. A list of relevant papers and documents is in the Appendix for members' easy reference. The papers and documents marked with asterisk (*) are available on the Research and Library Services Information System and the Council's website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/english/index.htm>.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 May 2007

Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Date of Meeting</u>	<u>Minutes/Papers</u>
Meeting between Legislative Council (LegCo) Members and Tsuen Wan District Council (TWDC)	6 May 1999 14 December 2000 5 July 2001 23 May 2002 23 January 2003 6 January 2005 10 November 2005 9 November 2006	Final Report of Study on impacts, environment and disposition for Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse (summary of the report was circulated to the FSEH Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)709/02-03 issued on 18 December 2002) Minutes of the meetings (restricted to Members attending the meetings)
Legislative Council	25 April 2001	Report No. 36 of the Director of Audit on the Results of Value for Money Audits*
	4 July 2001	Report of the Public Accounts Committee on Report No. 36 of the Director of Audit on the Results of Value for Money Audits*

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Date of Meeting</u>	<u>Minutes/Papers</u>
Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene	28 October 2003	<p>Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)154/03-04(03)]</p> <p>Background paper prepared by the LegCo Secretariat [LC Paper No. CB(2)154/03-04(04)]</p> <p>Submission from Mr CHOW Ping-tim, Tsuen Wan District Council member [LC Paper No. CB(2)196/03-04(01)]</p> <p>Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2)553/03-04]</p> <p>Follow-up paper provided by the Administration on nuisance caused by the Tsuen Wan Slaughterhouse [LC Paper No. CB(2)2985/03-04(01)]</p>
	29 June 2004	<p>Administration's paper [LC Paper No. CB(2)2930/03-04(05)]</p> <p>Minutes of meeting [LC Paper No. CB(2)3270/03-04]</p>
	----	<p>Responses from the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department on TWDC's concerns raised at the meeting between LegCo Members and TWDC on 9 November 2006 (issued to the FSEH Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)831/06-07(04) & (05) on 10 January 2007)</p>