

**Introductory Remarks by
Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee,
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS,
at the First Public Hearing of the Committee
on Tuesday, 9 December 2008**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee's public hearing relating to Report No. 51 of the Director of Audit on the results of value for money audits, which was tabled in the Legislative Council on 26 November 2008.

2. The Public Accounts Committee is a standing committee of the Legislative Council. It plays the role of a watchdog over public expenditure through consideration of the reports of the Director of Audit laid before the Council on the Government's accounts and the results of value for money audits of the Government and those organisations which receive funding from the Government. The consideration by the Committee of the Director's reports involves gathering evidence relevant to the facts contained in the Director's reports, so that the Committee may draw conclusions and make recommendations in a constructive spirit and forward-looking manner. I also wish to stress that the objective of the whole exercise is such that the lessons learned from past experience and our comments on the performance of the public officers or other personnel concerned will enable the Government to improve its control over the expenditure of public funds, with due regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

3. The consideration of the Director's reports follows an established process of public hearings where necessary, internal deliberations and publication of the Committee's report. The Committee has an established procedure for ensuring that the parties concerned have a reasonable opportunity to be heard. After the Committee is satisfied that it has ascertained the relevant facts, it will proceed to form its views on those facts, followed by a process of formulating its conclusions and recommendations to be included in its report. In accordance with Rule 72 of the Rules of Procedure of the Legislative Council, the Committee is required to make its report on the Director's report to the Legislative Council within three months of the date at which the Director's report is laid on the Table of the Council. Before then, we will not, as a committee or individually, be making any public comments.

4. Following a preliminary study of Report No. 51, the Committee has decided, in respect of four chapters in the Report, to invite the relevant public officers and other personnel concerned to appear before the Committee and answer our questions. We have, apart from this morning's hearing, also set aside 15 and 16 December 2008 and 6 January 2009 for public hearings on the other chapters.

5. The public hearing this morning is on Chapter 6 of Report No. 51 on the subject of "Management of public markets". The witnesses are: Dr Hon York CHOW Yat-ngok (Secretary for Food and Health), Ms Olivia NIP (Deputy Secretary for Food and Health), Mr Francis HO (Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health), Mr CHEUK Wing-hing (Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene), and Ms Julina CHAN (Deputy Director (Administration and Development)) and Ms Rhonda LO (Assistant Director (Operations)) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

6. I now proceed to the public hearing.