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Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

**Proposed extension of period of work
of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Public Markets**

Purpose

This paper reports on the progress of work of the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to Public Markets ("the Subcommittee") and invites members of the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene ("the Panel") to endorse the proposal of the Subcommittee to extend the period of its work and continue to operate in the 2014-2015 session.

Background

2. The Subcommittee was appointed by the Panel in February 2013 to study and review issues relating to the policy and business environment of public markets; assess the demand for public markets according to the district-based principle; examine the Administration's proposals for the rental adjustment mechanism and air-conditioning charging arrangement for public market stalls; and make timely recommendations. The House Committee agreed at its meeting on 15 November 2013 that the Subcommittee could be activated when a vacant slot arose in March 2014.

3. According to its work plan, the Subcommittee will focus its work on the following areas -

- (a) the positioning, functions and usages of public markets;
- (b) the consultancy study on improving the operating environment of public markets ("the Consultancy Study") commissioned by the Administration;
- (c) the Administration's proposed measures for improving the operating environment of public markets;

- (d) the rental adjustment mechanism for public market stalls;
- (e) the provision of air-conditioning facilities in public markets and the charging arrangement; and
- (f) issues relating to establishing new markets.

Work of the Subcommittee

4. Under the chairmanship of Hon Vincent FANG-kang, the Subcommittee has, since March 2014, held five meetings to study the following major issues -

- (a) the operating environment of public markets;
- (b) the progress of the Consultancy Study to develop proposals for improving the operating environment of public markets commensurate with their functions and positioning;
- (c) the positioning, functions and usages of public markets;
- (d) provision of air-conditioning facilities in public markets;
- (e) issues relating to establishing new markets; and
- (f) measures to improve the operating environment of public markets.

Need for continuation of work

Major work ahead

5. According to the Administration, there are at present 76 public wet markets managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. The facilities of some of the public markets have aged with the passage of time, and their design and layout are too old-fashioned to keep up with present-day expectations of patrons. Shoppers' preferences and behaviour, the availability of alternative shopping facilities in the community, as well as the profile of shoppers and market tenants have also been evolving in the course of time, in tandem with rising expectations on the part of consumers who patronize public markets.

6. Members have raised various concerns about the problems faced by public market stall operators including outdated market facilities and patronage, and the persistently high vacancy rates in some public markets. Members held the view that the Administration should review the public market policy and examine the functions and positioning of public markets before putting forward any proposals for rental adjustment. At its meeting on 25 March 2014, the Subcommittee was advised that the Administration had engaged BMT Asia Pacific ("the Consultant") to conduct a consultancy study to improve the operating environment of public markets. The Consultant was expected to come up with improvement proposals for specified markets and provide general suggestions for the routine improvement works for public markets. When meeting with the Administration and the Consultant in April 2014, members urged the Administration and the Consultant to (a) enhance the design of public markets; (b) improve the operating environment of public markets; (c) increase the patronage of public markets; and (d) ensure that public markets would provide a clean and hygienic shopping environment and good quality commodities at affordable prices.

7. The Subcommittee was briefed by the Consultant on the key findings of the Consultancy Study and the Administration on its preliminary thinking on measures to improve the operating environment of public markets at the meeting on 20 January 2015. According to the Administration, the Consultant is expected to complete several tasks including - (a) tendering views on the functions and positioning of public markets; (b) surveying the public markets and coming up with concrete improvement proposals for six representative ones that would serve as "prototype" for reference to other public markets; (c) providing some general suggestions for the routine improvement works for public markets; and (d) suggesting ways and pragmatic measures to preserve market stalls that are selling traditional commodities or involving traditional specialty. It is incumbent upon the Subcommittee to follow up the outcome of the Consultancy Study and the Administration's proposed measures for improving the operating environment of public markets.

8. The Administration has advised the Subcommittee that the Consultant will take another two or three months to finalize the Consultancy Study. Afterwards, the Administration will brief members on its preliminary proposals to improve the operating environment of public markets and, at the same time, the proposal for rental adjustment mechanism for public markets.

Proposed extension of period of work

9. Rule 26(c) of the House Rules provides that a subcommittee should complete its work within 12 months of its commencement and report to the relevant Panel(s). If it is necessary for a subcommittee to work beyond

12 months, the subcommittee should, after obtaining the endorsement of the relevant Panel(s), report to the House Committee and give justifications for an extension of the 12-month period.

10. The work of the Subcommittee ties in with the progress of the Administration's work on taking forward the Consultancy Study's proposed measures to improve the operating environment of public markets. Having regard to the outstanding matters which need to be followed up by the Subcommittee as set out in paragraphs 5 to 8 above and the time required by the Subcommittee to conclude its work and finalize its recommendations, the Subcommittee agreed at its meeting on 20 January 2015 that it should continue its work in the 2014-2015 session.

Advice sought

11. Members are invited to note the progress of work of the Subcommittee and endorse the proposal of the Subcommittee to extend the period of its work and continue to operate in the 2014-2015 legislative session (i.e. until 30 September 2015). Subject to the views of members of the Panel, a report will be made to the House Committee for seeking its approval of the proposal.

Council Business Division 2
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