

Where will WP house Punggol East town council?

Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council can only vacate office when it finds an alternative site

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The Workers' Party (WP) may need to look for an alternative site to locate its town council office in Punggol East, because the existing town council office in the constituency — at Block 156A, Rivervale Crescent — will continue to be used by the People's Action Party (PAP)-run Pasir Ris-Punggol town council for at least another six months while the ruling party looks for another site of its own.

According to Pasir Ris-Punggol town council Chairman Zainal Sapari, this is because the town council — which used to serve the residents of both Pasir Ris-Punggol Group Representation Constituency (GRC) and the Punggol East single seat ward when it was helmed by the PAP, would still need at least two offices to serve the residents of the GRC, as is the case with other GRCs.

Mr Zainal, nevertheless, said his town council will vacate its Rivervale Crescent office once it is able to find an alternate site in Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC and the search will take “at least six months”.

A check by TODAY showed that town councils which are managing GRCs have at least two offices. Apart from its Rivervale Crescent office, Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council has another office at Blk 577, Pasir Ris St 53. Mr Zainal explained that his town council has five years remaining on a 10-year lease for its Rivervale Crescent premises.

After his town council moves out, it would be up to the WP to write in to the Housing and Development Board (HDB) if the Opposition party is interested to take over the office, he said. The HDB did not respond to TODAY's queries by press time. The WP also did not reply to this newspaper's questions on the issue but party Chairman Sylvia Lim did say the WP expects to issue a statement on the town council takeover in the middle of the week.

Stressing that the handover of the Punggol East ward will be “smooth”, Mr Zainal cited the matter as one of two issues — the other is the transfer of town council funds — that have to be discussed with the WP.

He said that he had been in touch with Ms Lim on the matter. A meeting has been planned “very soon” to agree on a timeline and work processes of the handover, he added.

He also assured that the town council funds will be allocated back to Punggol East Town Council “in a transparent way”, as items such as the operating fund is calculated based on per unit household.

Institute of Policy Studies' Senior Research Fellow Gillian Koh reiterated that protocols and standard operating procedures have to be established for "the transition from one MP (Member of Parliament) to another, or to an Opposition MP and the most important thing is that (the parties) realise that we are in a new territory and they have to figure out how to manage it better".

Singapore Management University School of Law's Assistant Professor and Nominated Member of Parliament Eugene Tan added: "Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council will have to be careful not to take on unnecessary bad publicity as they could be seen as stonewalling the WP ... They have had enough bad press over the AIM (Action Information Management) issue and the PAP can do without another issue that can generate as much bad press."

Mr Zainal, who had a meeting with town council staff yesterday, also said that the employees who were looking after the Punggol East ward — there are fewer than 10 of them — will be absorbed by the Pasir Ris-Punggol Town Council's managing agent, E M Services. The WP is expected to appoint its own managing agent.