

LegCo Panel on Housing
Follow-up to Meeting on 7 May 2001
Regulatory Practices Used for Public Housing Projects

Background

At the meeting of the LegCo Panel on Housing held on 7 May 2001, Members requested the Administration to advise on the regulatory control practices used for public housing projects before the Independent Checking Unit (ICU) of the Housing Department (HD) was established and the main differences between HD practices and those required under the Buildings Ordinance (BO).

Control under the BO

2. The essence of the BO is a system by Government of approvals and consents of building designs and construction proposals and follow-up site inspections against the approved plans, as the work proceeds. The Buildings Department (BD) applies the BO through a system of third-party auditing and sanction. Many of BD's practices are well established in the HD, although the checking is done by the project teams at HD and generally not by third parties.

HD practices during the design stage

3. HD Project teams have operated a system of self-regulatory building control as required by departmental procedures and this has been supported by a thorough system of design approvals at each stage of the project. To support this system, separate approvals are routinely sought from the Fire Services Department, Water Supplies Department, Drainage Services Department, Highways Department, Civil Engineering Department and the Geotechnical Engineering Office or other government departments depending on the needs of the project.

4. The public housing programme has relied heavily on the use of standard domestic block designs in the past. These designs have, as a general practice, been submitted to the BD for comment before their use in projects. BD checking was generally to confirm that means of escape were in accordance with the codes of practice and that the building would in principle be acceptable as a private development.

5. Since 1998, individual estate design projects have been checked by the HD Project Support and Vetting Unit. Project teams may also make ad-hoc enquiries to the BD from time to time on details of the regulations.

HD practices during the construction stage

6. Quality and site safety controls, consistent with the BO requirements, are included in departmental procedures and contract documents. There are a number of audit processes in place, some of which are third party:

- (a) Since 1996, third-party site safety audits have been conducted on each building site by independent auditors such as the Occupational Safety and Health Council.
- (b) The Internal Audit Unit in Development and Construction Branch of HD conducts office and site audits on the compliance with specifications and procedures in projects.
- (c) The Lift Ordinance Enforcement Unit checks and certifies new and existing lifts and escalators.

7. The Housing Authority (HA) employs building contractors who are Registered General Building Contractors under the BO as a listing requirement since 1990 and Registered Specialist Contractors for piling works since October 2000.

HD practices at the completion stage and during occupation

8. Upon completion of the works, the Chief Architect or Chief Engineer, depending upon the stage of the work, will carry out completion inspections under the contract. For Home Ownership Scheme, there is a further inspection at the final completion stage, prior to handover, where a completion certificate is issued, to certify that the buildings are fit for use.

9. A further separate audit team, the Technical Audit Unit which is under the Director of Housing, conducts wide ranging audits on the efficiency of the departmental systems, practices and procedures in capital and maintenance projects and covers all stages of the projects, from design and construction to completion and occupation.

HD and BD building control systems

10. The main differences between HA projects and those governed by the BO is the absence of the full third-party checking and statutory sanctions on responsible parties for public housing projects. On the other hand, projects governed by the BO are subject to independent checks by the Building Authority and parties involved in their design and construction including Authorised Person, Registered Structural Engineer, Registered General Building Contractors and Registered Specialist Contractors are subject to statutory sanctions under the BO for negligence or unethical practices.

11. As described above, the existing practices in HA projects combine checking by project teams according to departmental project administration and approval procedures with third-party checking by teams that are independent of the projects. The ICU aims to implement a full third party checking system at all key stages of projects in line with that required under the BO.

Housing Department

17 May 2001