

Information Paper for Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Enhancement of Transparency in the Dissemination of Housing Information

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the current arrangements in the dissemination of housing information to the public.

Principle of Transparency in Dissemination of Housing Information

2. The Administration supports and adopts the principle of openness and transparency of housing policy. We consider greater transparency a key to encourage and enhance communication with the public and the Legislative Council to enable them to have a better appreciation of housing policies and their rationales. We have therefore established channels for effective dissemination of housing policy to the public.

3. Information on general housing matters is accessible to the public through printed fact sheets and booklets, and home pages of the Housing Bureau and relevant Government departments. Whenever there are major changes in housing policy, the Administration will announce them through press releases, briefings for the Legislative Council and the media, and printed and electronic publications as appropriate. The Administration also responds to enquiries from the public as promptly and openly as possible and in accordance with the Code on Access to Information.

4. In respect of public housing policy, the Housing Authority (HA), being an important statutory agent for implementation of public housing programme, has always been open and transparent. It has taken many proactive measures to enhance its communication with stakeholders and the public at large. The following channels are commonly used to announce events or issues of importance -

- (a) press briefings and releases to announce or explain new policies or reinforce existing ones;
- (b) estate newsletters, pamphlets and the Department's homepage on the Internet;

- (c) briefings for members of the Legislative Council, District Councils and other interested parties and stakeholders; and
- (d) counter enquiry service at the HA Customer Service Centre, Home Ownership Centre, estate offices, Housing Information Centres and the Department's Hotlines.

It also responds to public enquiries on specific issues promptly in accordance with the Code on Access to Information.

Issue on Revision of Income and Assets Limits

5. Members have made specific reference to the dissemination of information on the income and asset limits for nine-person and above households for application under the Home Ownership Scheme. In approving the income and asset limits for application for public rental housing and Home Ownership Scheme on 8 February 2001, the HA's Home Ownership Committee and Rental Housing Committee also endorsed that the higher limits for public rental housing application for large families (seven persons and above) should also apply to the Home Ownership Scheme so as to rationalize the discrepancies between the two. Subsequent to the joint meeting of the Rental Housing Committee and Home Ownership Committee on 8 February 2001, the HA held a press briefing and issued a press release to announce the new limits.

6. Information on new income and asset limits for Home Ownership Scheme applications for large families for 2000/01 was not included in the press release because its main purpose was to announce the general adjustments of the limits. Hence, detailed information on the limits was not included. Likewise, such detailed information was not included in the information paper for the Legislative Council Panel on Housing (CB(1) 708/00-01(05)) since the paper focused on the rationale of the HA to lower the income and asset limits for Home Ownership Scheme and Waiting List applicants.

7. For Home Ownership Scheme Phase 23A which was launched on 2 May 2001, the HA has drawn applicants' attention to the income and asset limits for large families through the following means –

- (a) the information is highlighted on the back cover of the information pack (which includes the sales pamphlets and application forms) distributed to the press and the general public;

- (b) the information is shown on the display panel at the Home Ownership Scheme Phase 23A exhibition held at the Home Ownership Centre;
- (c) a detailed breakdown of the income and asset limits is given on the Application Guide of the White Form application; and
- (d) all front-line staff members of the Sales Hotline and Enquiry Counters have been thoroughly briefed on the new limits and are ready to provide detailed information to the public.

8. The HA upholds the principle of openness and transparency in implementation of public housing programme. While the existing communication channels are effective in disseminating information to the public, the Housing Bureau and the Housing Department would continue to enhance the transparency of housing information to meet the public expectations.

Housing Bureau and Housing Department
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