

13 July 2001

To : Staff of the Housing Department

Dear Colleagues,

Following the Housing Authority's (HA) approval of the phased service transfer (PST) programme, the Management Buy Out (MBO) Option and the Voluntary Departure Scheme (VDS) in January 2000, many of you have expressed concerns on various occasions and through various channels. Those who intend to stay are concerned about whether they can continue to retain their civil servant status until retirement. Some have expressed worries over the possibility of too rapid an acceleration of the pace of service transfer which might expose them to the risk of being made redundant. Despite thorough explanation to staff on various occasions, some of you remain troubled by the uncertain future. So I am writing to you individually to explain the situation again, and hopefully to allay all of your concerns.

In support of the Government's policy objective of encouraging home ownership, the HA approved the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) in December 1997. In anticipation of the fact that in the long term, owners of TPS estates may eventually select private service providers for management and maintenance of their property, it was necessary for the Department to adopt some precautionary measures. Thus the various schemes launched in January 2000 by the HA aimed to avoid the possible staff surplus problem through an orderly transfer of services to private service providers which would simultaneously facilitate staff crossing over to the private sector if they so wished. Under the VDS, the choice of leaving or staying is purely voluntary and the Department fully respects staff's decision.

In its Review of the PSI, the HA Task Force have taken account of staff's concern over the pace of service transfer and have decided to adopt the principle that the target and pace of the future PST programme would be based on the actual number of staff leaving the Department under the VDS. In other words, the pace and scale of service transfer will be "VDS-led".

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As VDS is a voluntary exercise and given the sizeable number of staff grades engaging in estate management and maintenance duties, there may be gaps between the departure dates of individual staff and the pace of service transfer. It is therefore understandable that some of those who remain in the Department may have some concerns over their working arrangements under such circumstances. I would like to reassure you that there is no need to be concerned as suitable measures will be devised to overcome problems of temporary staff mismatch. For example, in the event of interim staff shortage at particular ranks, acting appointments will be arranged, and, where necessary, additional time-limited HA contract posts could be created. The Department will do all it can to ensure that our high quality service will not be compromised in the process and we hope that all of you will share this same commitment.

On the basis of the above principles and the redeployment arrangements set out below, the Department can guarantee to all EMM Grades staff affected by PSI that in the course of implementing subsequent phases of PST, we will not consider any forced redundancy measures. However, should staff mismatches occur, colleagues concerned will be required to cooperate fully with the Department in respect of arrangements for training and re-deployment.

In order that those colleagues who choose to remain as civil servants in the Department can continue to provide the best service to the community, suitable and reasonable training and re-deployment opportunities (both within and outside the Department) would be explored and provided to resolve possible staff mismatch problems. The guiding principles for training and redeployment are set out at Appendix.

I hope the above assurance provided by the Department will relieve all of your concerns over job security. Let us work together, for both the Department and the HA, to provide the best public housing services to the community.

Director of Housing

Appendix

Principles of Training and Re-deployment :

- (i) Staff should be re-deployed within the same staff group (Housing Group and Works Group) as far as possible such that the broad nature of their job would remain unchanged.
- (ii) The entry requirements of the new and original posts should be comparable.
- (iii) After re-deployment, the rank, salary, benefits and conditions of service of the staff concerned will not be reduced as a result.
- (iv) Re-deployment will not result in staff taking up responsibilities of a higher rank without having considered promotion or acting appointment.
- (v) Re-deployment to other government departments should be arranged on a voluntary basis as far as possible.
- (vi) Necessary training will be provided to ensure that colleagues would be capable of taking up the duties in new postings.