

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Estate Management and Maintenance of Facilities in Public Housing Estates

Purpose

This paper provides information on hawker control and maintenance of facilities in public housing estates.

Hawker Control in Public Housing Estates

2. The Housing Department seeks to maintain a decent living environment for public housing tenants. One of our major management actions is to prevent nuisance from illegal hawking. A dedicated task force, i.e. the Mobile Operations Unit (MOU), has been formed to take enforcement actions, such as seizures and arrests, against illegal hawkers. Where necessary, joint operations with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department are carried out to prevent hawkers from shuttling in and out of estate boundaries. In the past year, a total of 1 755 MOU operations resulting in 630 arrests and 2 233 seizures and 192 joint operations with 46 arrests and 183 seizures were conducted.

3. For flexible and cost-effective estate management, the Housing Department has contracted out a number of the public housing estates to Property Services Companies. These companies are contractually required to ensure that estates under their charge are free from hawking nuisance. To discharge their responsibilities, the Property Services Companies deploy round-the-clock security guards or employ additional hawker control guards to restrict illegal hawking activities. If necessary, MOU will assist Property Services Companies in their operations.

4. To ensure that the services provided by Property Services Companies are up to standard, the Housing Department conducts monthly performance audits and random spot checks. If the performance of a Property Services Company is unsatisfactory, disciplinary actions, including issuing of warnings and reminders, giving guidance on the

improvement measures or asking for replacement of key staff, will be taken. Repeated failures may lead to suspension from tendering for new contracts, termination of existing contracts or even removal from Housing Department's approved lists. In 2002, 235 verbal warnings, 16 reminders and six written warnings were issued to Property Services Companies who were less than effective in hawker control.

5. It had been suggested that staff of Property Services Companies should be given statutory powers for more effective hawker control. Under section 43 of the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance (Chapter 1), statutory powers can only be delegated to public officers. Entrustment of statutory powers to private-sector Property Services Companies is thus legally untenable. Instead, we have adopted the following measures to enhance hawker control in public rental housing.

6. In October 2002, the five regional teams of the MOU were centralized so that resources could be focused on estates with recurrent and serious illegal hawking problems. Whenever necessary, MOU staff will be deployed to support staff of Property Services Companies in combating illegal hawking.

7. To enhance operational effectiveness, we maintain close liaison with the Police and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for joint actions and formulation of enforcement strategies. To facilitate strategic planning, headcounting surveys are conducted regularly to update the hawking profile.

8. We are keen to combat illegal hawking in all public housing estates, irrespective of their management agents. We will continue to adopt a flexible approach in devising suitable and effective hawker control strategies in response to changing circumstances.

Estate Maintenance

9. Members have expressed concern at previous incidents involving falling parts from three security doors at block entrances. All the three incidents involved housing estates where management and maintenance services have been outsourced to Property Services

Companies. In the first incident at Cheung Tsing Estate, a door leaf under repair by a technician of the Property Services Company slipped off its pivot bolt and fell onto a child. Investigation revealed that due to miscommunication between the technician and the security guard, the door leaf was left unattended when the technician went off to seek assistance for adjustment on the hinge. When the child tried to open the door, the door fell and hit him.

10. In the other two cases at Fu Cheong Estate and Chuk Yuen (South) Estate, a loosened magnet and an unsecured armature plate from the electro-magnetic locks installed at the top of the security doors fell onto passing tenants. The use of inappropriate screws by the installation contractors in fixing the locks was the cause of the accidents.

Parties involved and their responsibilities

11. The Housing Department seeks to ensure the highest standards of safety and maintenance in public housing estates. The following measures have all along been in place to monitor and supervise the performance of its contractors, including the Property Services Companies:

- (a) clear and effective guidelines for the maintenance of estate facilities;
- (b) regular audit and checks on the work of its contractors and on the estate facilities;
- (c) dedicated teams and professional staff from the Housing Department to examine the facilities in public housing estates to ensure public safety; and
- (d) effective monitoring and disciplinary mechanisms on its contractors with a view to raising their accountability and service standards.

12. On specific actions taken in the three incidents, we have issued written warnings to the Property Services Companies managing the three estates and the contractors responsible for installing the security doors in Fu Cheong and Chuk Yuen (South) Estates.

Measures to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents

Immediate measures

13. Immediately after the incidents, inspections were conducted by the Housing Department, the Property Services Companies and the maintenance contractors on the security doors in all public housing estates. These included the territory-wide inspections carried out by professional and technical staff from the Housing Department to over 4 800 security doors in all public housing estates. Immediate adjustment was made by the teams and any inadequately secured or inappropriate screws found during the inspections were instantly secured or replaced. All security doors in public rental housing estates are now safe and in good working condition.

Medium term measures

14. The Housing Department has also put in place a series of preventive measures to enable more effective checks and repairs of security doors:

- (a) a dedicated team has been set up in each estate in mid February 2003 to conduct regular inspections and, where necessary, effect instant minor repairs to the security doors;
- (b) for better monitoring and greater transparency, records of inspections and repairs carried out to these doors are made available at estate offices for inspection by Housing Department staff and members of the public;
- (c) to improve the skills of the technicians of the Housing Department and Property Services Companies in the maintenance and repairs of these doors, training sessions have been organized and technical guidelines will be drawn up in

collaboration with the material suppliers and installation contractors; and

- (d) signage will soon be put up to remind tenants of the proper use of the doors.

Long term measures

15. As a long term measure to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents, safety measures and design modifications will be implemented in stages to cope with the variations in quality of workmanship and maintenance by contractors. In the coming few months, arrangements will be made, where appropriate, to install straps over electro-magnetic locks, to fix armature plates with bolt-and-nut through door leafs, to install safety wires linking door leafs with door frames, and to set up inspection panels on the transoms to facilitate future inspection and maintenance. When the existing hinges or locks of security doors are due for replacement, modifications will be made to the door hinge system or the method of fixing the locks, including the armature plates.

16. The Housing Department is also undertaking a comprehensive design review on the security doors in new housing projects, covering aspects like choice of materials, locks, hinges as well as installation methods. Improvements will be introduced where necessary to the new estates coming on stream.

Housing Department
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