

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Provision of Overcrowding Relief to Public Housing Tenants

Purpose

This paper updates Members of the current arrangements for the provision of overcrowding relief to public housing tenants.

Background

2. At present, the minimum space allocation standard for public rental housing is 5.5 m². Public housing households with a living area of less than 5.5 m² Internal Floor Area (IFA)^{Note 1} per person are categorized as “overcrowded” households. These households are given priority for overcrowding relief through transfer to larger flats. In addition, through the Comprehensive Redevelopment Programme, tenants living in congested flats in old-style estates can also relocate to more spacious flats in new housing estates. These efforts have reduced the number of overcrowded public housing households from 80 937 in 1992 to 10 324 now.

3. With rising expectations for better quality of living, many public housing households aspire for more generous space provision. With 90 274 applicants still on the Waiting List, our priority continues to be rehousing applicants on the Waiting List as well as families affected by clearances. Nevertheless, with a larger supply of flats in recent years through transfer of Home Ownership Scheme flats to the rental stock, we have implemented various transfer exercises to allow households to move to larger flats of their own preferences.

4. The current arrangements for transfers to enhance space provisions are described in the following paragraphs.

Provision of Overcrowding Relief

5. To improve the living environment of overcrowded households, i.e. those with a living area of less than 5.5m² IFA per person, we have always been

^{Note 1} Internal Floor Area (IFA) is the total area inside the flat measured to the internal face of external and/or party walls (i.e. common walls between two flats). For major public housing block types, 1 m² IFA is approximately equivalent to 1.11 to 1.20 m² Saleable Area, which is the floor area unit commonly used in private-sector property transactions.

taking proactive measures to rehouse them to more spacious accommodation, subject to their acceptance of our offers. This is a commitment we seek to honour through continuous efforts.

6. In the past, as overcrowding relief was provided on individual estate basis, the flats available for selection were limited and there was mismatch in the supply and demand of flats for provision of overcrowding relief in different districts. To make fuller and better use of available resources for overcrowding relief, and to enhance the range of choices for overcrowded households, we have since 2001 implemented centralized, territory-wide overcrowding relief exercises to be held twice or thrice a year. All overcrowded families are invited to apply. The priority of allocation is determined, in sequence, by living density, household size and length of residence in existing tenancy.

7. Since 2001, three overcrowding relief exercises were launched. We set aside 9 170 public housing flats for these exercises, of which 72% were new flats and 67% were located in urban or extended urban areas. A total of 7 480 (48%) applications from 15 615 overcrowded families responded to our invitation and 3 310 of them had transferred to bigger flats of their choice.

8. Detailed statistics on the flats earmarked for these three overcrowding relief exercises is at Annex A. The fourth exercise has recently been launched, with 2 000 flats set aside for selection by eligible households.

Management Transfers

9. To address the aspirations of some public housing households who wish to move to more spacious flats, we also launch management transfer exercises when suitable flats are available. All households irrespective of living density can apply. In the interest of equitable allocation of housing resources, nonetheless, households with higher living density are accorded higher priority for flat allocation.

10. Since 1999, we have launched 21 management transfer exercises, and 14 135 flats (including the 6 946 flats originally earmarked for overcrowding relief not chosen by eligible households) were set aside for allocation to interested families. These exercises attracted a total of 10 509 applications, with living density ranging from 3.36 m² to 11.11 m² IFA per person. Of them, 4 037 have been allocated larger flats meeting their preferences. A breakdown of the flats earmarked for these management transfers by district is at Annex B.

Compassionate Transfers

11. As some public housing families may require extra space provisions to meet their unique personal and medical needs, special transfers will also be arranged on a need basis upon Social Welfare Department's recommendation. Since 1999, 4 055 such special transfers were made.

Branch Family Members

12. Members have expressed concern about the position of branch families. Branch family members of public rental households can apply for allocation of a separate flat through the Waiting List. Over the past three years, we have rehoused some 15 000 branch families of public rental households.

Way Forward

13. The Housing Authority sets aside an annual allocation quota for the implementation of the various relief and transfer exercises mentioned above. The quota for 2000/01, 2001/02 and 2002/03 are 6 000, 7 000 and 8 000 rental flats respectively. Overcrowded households and families aspiring for larger space provision already have ample opportunities to improve their living conditions. We observe from the statistics set out in paragraphs 7 and 10 that in these overcrowding relief and management transfer exercises, the number of flats we have offered actually exceeded the number of families applying. This shows that public housing tenants are not deprived of opportunities for more generous space provision. Instead, many have chosen to stay put because of other plans or specific preferences. Nonetheless, we will continue to set aside large flats for provision of overcrowding relief and management transfers as far as supply permits.

14. To conclude, the existing definition of overcrowded households at 5.5 m² IFA per person allows us to focus limited housing resources on those in greatest need for improvements in living density. It is assessed that any relaxation of space standard for overcrowding relief will commit the Government and the Housing Authority to a higher level of expenditure which in the Government's and the Housing Authority's financial situation is probably unsustainable in the long term.

**Number of public housing flats earmarked
for the Territory-wide Overcrowding Relief Exercises**

Location		Urban Areas	Extended Urban Areas	New Territories and Islands	<i>Total</i>
First Exercise (June 2001)	Refurbished flats	200	400	200	800
	New flats	450	430	320	1 200
	<i>Subtotal</i>	650	830	520	2 000
Second Exercise (December 2001)	Refurbished flats	330	330	270	930
	New flats	1 790	460	970	3 220
	<i>Subtotal</i>	2 120	790	1 240	4 150
Third Exercise (May 2002)	Refurbished flats	250	240	380	870
	New flats	340	940	870	2 150
	<i>Subtotal</i>	590	1 180	1 250	3 020
Total		3 360	2 800	3 010	9 170

**Number of public housing flats pooled for
Management Transfer Exercises
(launched from 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2002)**

District	New Flats	Refurbished Flats	Total
Urban Areas	3 033 (21.4%)	388 (2.7%)	3 421 (24.2%)
Extended Urban Areas	5 049 (35.7%)	159 (1.1%)	5 208 (36.8%)
New Territories	4 197 (29.7%)	1 240 (8.8%)	5 437 (38.5%)
Islands	69 (0.5%)	—	69 (0.5%)
Total	12 348 (87.4%)	1 787 (12.6%)	14 135 (100%)

Note: Figures in brackets denote corresponding percentages of the total number of flats pooled for these exercises. They may not add up due to rounding.