

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Assistance to Elderly Owners of Dilapidated Properties

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the Housing Authority's efforts in providing assistance to elderly owners of dilapidated properties.

Background

2. At its meeting on 7 April 2004, when discussing the living problems facing elderly owners of dilapidated properties (vide paper No. CB(1)1444/03-04(04)), the Legislative Council Panel on Housing suggested that the Housing Authority should review its policy and arrangements in order to strengthen the assistance to elderly property owners in need. The Housing Authority reviewed the relevant policy on 19 May 2004, taking account of the views expressed by the Panel and other organisations. Having regard to the objective of the public housing programme, and to ensure rational allocation of scarce public housing resources to those in genuine need, the Housing Authority maintained that the property ownership restriction for applicants for public rental housing should be upheld.

3. Nonetheless, in recognition of the daily living problems faced by some elderly property owners in dilapidated buildings, the Housing Authority has decided to put in place a discretionary, ex-gratia arrangement allowing them to move into Housing for Senior Citizens flats.

The Ex-gratia Arrangement

4. Under the ex-gratia arrangement, elderly property owners in need of rehousing will be allocated Housing for Senior Citizens flats on a licence basis under the Compassionate Rehousing Scheme. In considering the applications from elderly property owners, the Social Welfare Department will take account of the prevailing eligibility criteria for compassionate rehousing and the following requirements:

- (a) the applicant and all family members in the application must be aged 60 or above (discretion may be exercised in special cases with family members aged below 60);
- (b) the applicant and his family members have owned and lived in the property concerned for 10 years or more; and
- (c) the property concerned must be located in a walk-up block without lift service.

5. During their stay in the Housing for Senior Citizens, the elderly property owners concerned can dispose of their property if they wish to apply for public rental housing. They are required to pay a licence fee equivalent to the rental of the Housing for Senior Citizens flat and to declare household income and assets annually. Taking account of the Panel's views, the Housing Authority agreed that the licence should continue until the elderly property owners have disposed of their property and met the eligibility criteria for public rental housing^{Note}. Their ex-gratia licence will then be converted into normal public housing tenancy. Like all other elderly applicants on the Waiting List, they may choose public rental flats in the urban area, extended urban area or the New Territories.

6. In respect of the new ex-gratia arrangement, the Social Welfare Department has issued internal guidelines and held briefing sessions to familiarise frontline staff with the eligibility criteria and the locations of Housing for Senior Citizens flats.

^{Note} Given that most of the elderly applicants are either retired or on very low income, many of them have to rely on savings to meet their daily expenses. There is therefore a case to adopt a more generous approach for setting the asset limits for elderly households to cater for their specific circumstances. The Housing Authority has decided to set the Waiting List asset limits for elderly households at two times the asset limits for non-elderly applicants from 2005-06 onwards.

Current Position

7. Since implementation of the ex-gratia arrangements set out above, the Social Welfare Department has, after evaluation, recommended six cases to the Housing Department. Of these, one family has already been rehoused to a Housing for Senior Citizens flat with en suite toilet. Follow-up work for the remaining cases is in progress.

Way Forward

8. Housing for Senior Citizens flats are provided with cleansing service and round-the-clock warden to maintain the hygiene and cleanliness of shared facilities and common areas and to provide ready assistance to the elderly tenants. Notwithstanding, some elderly property owners may have difficulty in sharing facilities with other tenants owing to their special needs (e.g. renal patients who have to use haemodialysis machine). The Housing Department accepts that discretion may be exercised to rehouse elderly property owners with special and genuine need to self-contained public rental flats on a licence basis to cater for their individual circumstances.

9. The ex-gratia arrangement described above provides flexibility in addressing the special needs of elderly property owners with daily living problems, while still ensuring the rational allocation of public housing resources. The Housing Department will continue to collaborate with the Social Welfare Department closely and promulgate the ex-gratia arrangement more widely so that timely and appropriate assistance can be rendered to needy elders.