

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Housing for Senior Citizens

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the allocation of Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) flats.

Background

2. In the interest of better care for elderly tenants of public rental housing, since 1987 the Housing Authority has been providing hostel-type HSC flats featuring shared facilities such as, depending on type, common living room, dining room, bathroom and kitchen for its elderly tenants aged 60 or over. These flats are provided with cleansing services and round-the-clock warden to maintain the hygiene and cleanliness of shared facilities and common areas and offer ready assistance to tenants. The concept is to foster a caring social environment with enriched community life. From time to time, social service agencies organise recreational and cultural activities in the common living rooms for the elderly tenants.

3. Housing Department conducted a survey to gauge the level of satisfaction of HSC tenants in 1999. Survey findings indicated that tenants were generally satisfied with the overall living environment and provision of warden service and emergency alarm system but found it rather inconvenient to share kitchens and bathrooms with other tenants. With increasing supply of self-contained small public rental flats, the vacancy rates of HSC flats increased from 1.7% in March 1997 to 8.3% in March 2000. Noting that HSC was not the preferred choice among elders, the Housing Authority conducted a comprehensive review on the provision of public housing for the elderly and, in November 2000, decided to cease the development of new HSC. For existing HSC flats, the minimum age for access was lowered from 60 to 55.

Audit Review

4. In 2001, the Audit Commission carried out an investigation into “residential services for the elderly”, in which HSC was also examined. In view of the relatively high vacancy of HSC flats, the Audit Commission recommended that the Housing Authority should consider allocating the vacant HSC flats to other applicants on the Waiting List for public rental housing so as to make the full use of these flats.

5. Having regard to the Audit Commission's observations on the provision of HSC flats, the Housing Authority decided in November 2001 to lift the age requirement for access to HSC, with priority given to elderly applicants. Furthermore, HSC blocks with high vacancy were also considered for conversion to self-contained rental flats or other beneficial uses subject to structural and technical feasibility. We have subsequently leased the HSC in Fu Tai Estate to an operator of residential care home for the elderly in April 2004. The HSC flats in Chung On Estate, which are located in the lower floors of the domestic blocks, have also been converted to normal self-contained flats in 2003. Similar conversion for the 152 HSC flats in Wah Lai Estate will be carried out later this year.

6. At present, the number of HSC flats stands at 10 057 (including the 152 flats in Wah Lai Estate mentioned above). While we will continue to identify suitable HSC flats beset with letting problems for conversion into self-contained ones, conversion is not a cost-effective solution for most HSC flats because of formidable structural and technical complications. Our efforts in the past also showed that only very few operators are interested in using HSC to run elderly homes. Given that the majority of HSC flats (74%) are below 10 years of age, their continued use as public rental housing for allocation to singletons and small families in urgent need of subsidised accommodation seems to be the only viable option to make the best use of available resources.

Current Letting Situation of HSC

7. Since relaxation of the age requirement in November 2001, HSC flats are also offered to non-elderly applicants. As at 30 April 2005, of the 10 057 HSC flats, 1 690 flats (16.8%) are vacant. For the 7 606 occupied flats, 7 425 or 97.6% are taken up by singletons and the remaining 181 or 2.4% by two-person families. Elderly households, i.e. with all members aged 60 or above, account for 91% of the total. The rest, 681 as at April 2005, are non-elderly households. The age profile of the HSC households is set out at **Annex**.

Allocation of HSC Flats to Non-elderly Households

8. Although HSC is not a preferred choice among applicants for public rental housing, opening up allocation of HSC flats to non-elderly applicants has provided an additional choice to one-person and two-person families who wish prompt improvement to their living conditions. HSC flats have been included for allocation under the Express Flat Allocation Scheme since December 2001. In the past four express allocation exercises, 487 non-elderly applicants for public rental housing have opted HSC flats and have their waiting time substantially shortened. The Housing Authority will continue this allocation arrangement to expedite needy families' access to subsidised housing on the one hand and to improve the letting situation of HSC on the other.

Sharing of Common Facilities in HSC

9. To ensure harmonious relationship among tenants, wardens will encourage tenants to be considerate when using common facilities. While in general most tenants settle in well, disputes do arise occasionally due to differences in personal or social habits. In the past 12 months, there were 385 cases of disputes in 69 HSCs, of which only three involved non-elderly tenants. Tenants' age and age-related habits do not appear to have contributed to such disputes. With the assistance of wardens and social workers, most of the disputes are resolved quickly through mutual understanding and adjustment of personal habits. Depending on actual circumstances, the Housing Department will consider tenants' request for transfer. In the past five years, we have arranged 205 such transfers.

Way Forward

10. To make the best use of public housing resources, the Housing Department will continue to offer HSC flats to both elderly and non-elderly applicants for public rental housing through normal computerised allocation and the Express Flat Allocation Scheme. HSC wardens will step up efforts to promote harmony among tenants, mediate in occasional disputes and assist tenants in special needs.

**Analysis of Tenants in Housing for Senior Citizens Flats
(as at April 2005)**

(A) Analysis by Household Size & Population

| | Household | | | Population |
|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| | 1-Person | 2-Person | Total | |
| Elderly | 6 775 | 150 | 6 925 | 7 075 |
| Non-elderly | 650 | 31 | 681 | 712 |
| Total | 7 425 (97.6%) | 181 (2.4%) | 7 606 (100%) | 7 787 |

(B) Analysis of the Non-elderly Population by Age Group

| Age Group | Population | | |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| | 1-Person Household | 2-Person Household ^{Note} | Total |
| 0-17 | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| 18-30 | 72 | 6 | 78 |
| 31-39 | 129 | 14 | 143 |
| 40-49 | 230 | 5 | 235 |
| 50-59 | 219 | 17 | 236 |
| 60 and above | 0 | 13 | 13 |
| Total | 650 | 62 | 712 |

^{Note} Two-person non-elderly household may include elderly member aged 60 and above.