

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Additional Support and Care Services for Visually Impaired Residents in Public Housing Estates

Purpose

This paper provides information on the additional support and care services for visually impaired residents in public housing estates.

Background

2. According to the Special Topic Report No. 28 on “Persons with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases” published by Census and Statistics Department in 2001, there were about 73 000 visually impaired persons in Hong Kong. About 52% (38 100 persons) were residing in public housing estates. The Hong Kong Blind Union has recently suggested additional arrangements to strengthen the services and facilities for visually impaired residents in public housing estates with a view to promoting their equality, opportunity and independence in daily life.

Present Situation

3. Provisions for disabled persons are stipulated in the “Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997” (the Design Guide), which have been applied to all of the Housing Authority’s building contracts tendered since April 1998. Voice synthesizers, tactile marking and braille letters on call buttons inside lift cars and on the ground-floor door-phone and combination lock panels of the domestic buildings are provided in estates built after 2001. In estates with service centres for the blind, some are also provided with tactile guide paths from the service centre to the public transport terminus.

4. In order to facilitate barrier-free access within public housing estates for the elderly and disabled persons, dropped kerbs, ramps with tactile strips at the top and bottom, handrails and signs of the major common facilities are provided in all existing public housing estates. Up to now, 91 estates have been equipped with these provisions while installation works in 69 estates are in progress. Where necessary, facilities for the disabled persons such as alteration of toilets within flats for wheelchair users are also provided upon request.

Additional Support

5. To further facilitate visually impaired residents' access to and within estates, at its meeting on 25 October 2005, the Housing Authority decided to provide tactile guide paths to every block throughout all public housing estates, and speed up the provision of voice synthesizer, tactile marking and braille letter on call buttons inside lift cars and on the ground-floor door phones and combination lock panels of all existing domestic buildings.

6. Upon request from residents, braille letters will be added to their letter boxes located at the lobby entrance. The illumination level at specific locations will also be enhanced. In addition, bollards, thresholds and periphery walls posing potential danger will be re-painted with contrasting colours.

Care Services

7. In order to address the special needs of visually impaired residents, the Housing Department will seek to enhance the communication between estate management and these residents. The Management Office of each public housing estate is currently keeping a list of needy residents including the aged, the visually impaired, and the disabled. In case of emergency such as suspension of electricity or water supply, frontline management staff will phone the needy residents or make personal contact to give them first-hand information. The Management Office will visit the residents to update the information regularly so that the list can be kept comprehensive and accurate as far as possible.

8. In order to keep the visually impaired residents abreast of latest estate management information and other important messages, we will record the content of publicity pamphlets and periodic estate newsletters on cassette tapes for distribution to households with visually impaired members.

9. To ensure that tenants living in estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme also enjoy the same services, the Housing Department will, with the consent of the Owners' Corporations concerned, request their Management Agents to implement the same measures.

Implementation Arrangements

10. Details of these improvement works, in particular the provision of tactile guide paths, will have to be worked out in consultation with the Estate Management Advisory Committees concerned, the Hong Kong Blind Union and the Owners' Corporations concerned. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the improvement works will be completed in the coming three years.

Conclusion

11. The proposed improvement measures, which will cost about \$110 million in total, will help provide a better living environment for visually impaired residents, support their full integration into the community, and promote fairness and harmony in the society. These measures should be welcomed by the Hong Kong Blind Union, the Estate Management Advisory Committees and the community at large.

Housing Department
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